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Political Leadership, Not Overtesting, Is Our Real Challenge

By Joseph A. Ricciotti on November 13, 2015 9:10 AM

Editor's Note: Education Week Commentary editors asked seven education practitioners and leaders to respond to the White House's "Testing Action Plan" and a coinciding Council of the Great City Schools study on mandatory testing. Read what [each contributor](#) had to say.

It took the power of parents in the nation as part of the "opt out" of standardized testing movement to realize that the use of standardized tests in public education is a dismal failure. Needless to say, to hear the president of the United States shift his views on standardized testing should now prompt other politicians, both Democrats and Republicans, to give up the notion that testing can be used to assess students, teachers, and schools. Moreover, the change in the stifling use of standardized tests as a weapon against public school teachers will deal a deadly blow to the corporate education reformers in the country who relied on these tests for denigrating teachers, as well as for closing public schools and expanding charter schools.



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What is needed now in our schools across the nation is a return to allowing teachers the freedom and autonomy to be the sole determiners of student progress. Hence, teachers should be allowed and encouraged to use their expertise and judgment and to base their assessments upon teacher-made tests that are diagnostic and individualized to help determine student strengths and weaknesses. Likewise, these teacher-made tests will be used primarily to help to improve and strengthen instruction, which should be the sole purpose of testing in the classroom.

However, despite President Barack Obama's admission that we are "overtesting," the real challenge facing the teaching profession is a lack of leadership in Washington, DC. It is now up to potential presidential candidates such as Hillary Clinton or Bernie Sanders, if elected, to make the change of new leadership in the nation a reality by appointing a pro-public-education advocate—and preferably a former educator—as the next Secretary of Education. The newly appointed cabinet secretary's first legislative act as Education Secretary should be to diminish the role of high-stakes testing in the nation's public schools and to restore the dignity of the teaching profession.

In light of the early endorsement given to Hillary Clinton by both the National Education Association and the American Federation of Teachers, is it too much to ask Hillary Clinton—as well as other presidential candidates—about her views on the use of standardized tests in our public schools? Although all public school educators should rejoice in the admission by the president that we are "overtesting," the real joy will come when we have new pro-public-education leadership in Washington as secretary of education. Until then, it is premature to believe there will be any change until we see a fundamental shift of values and goals in which standardized testing plays a diminished role in our nation's public schools. We need organizations such as the NEA and the AFT to challenge the presidential candidates to make a positive difference in the education of our nation's children.

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