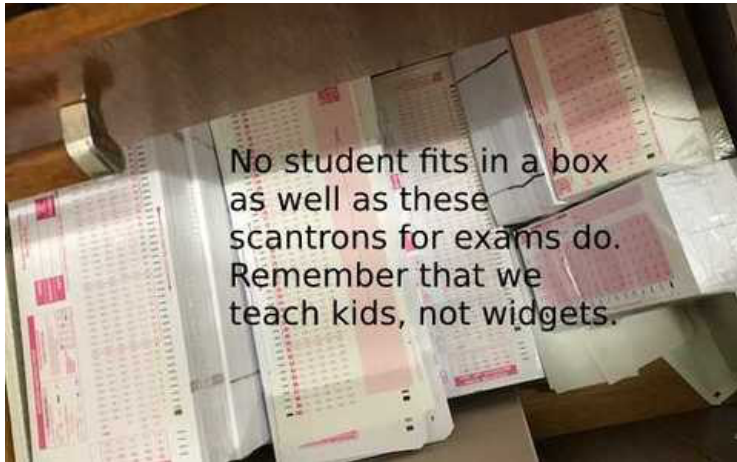


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## State Tests Do Not Assess Student Learning

By [Starr Sackstein](#) on April 24, 2018 5:05 AM

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Before third grade in NY, students are learning completely unencumbered by the fear and useless waste of time of state testing. Kids are free to learn in an environment that challenges their curiosities and classroom teachers in collaboration with school or district-wide expectations teach curricula that truly engage and assess students.

And we would all agree that students at this age should NOT be tested as they are too young and what those tests would show would likely not shed any light on future learning.

The classroom teacher is allowed to develop the assessments that are appropriate for their students and then review the assessments immediately after and determine future learning experiences based on the data from these assessments. The learning and the assessment

play a big role in planning and in individualized student learning.

By the time students make it to third grade, the state begins to test them. The teachers aren't involved in making these tests and like any standardized test, although the intention is to be able to see where students fit on a spectrum larger than just your class or even school, they aren't really about what students know and can do. If that was the ultimate goal, there would be multiple means for measuring it and comparing the data.

In NYS, the ELA and Math exams grades 3-8 are slowly losing their meaning altogether. The more families make the choice to opt their children out, the less the data even means because people don't look closely enough at the demographics of the students who ARE taking the tests.

For the record, when I shared that **I opt my son out**, many folks who read my post attacked me as a mother and my son claiming that I am a helicopter mom and that my son will never be able to get into the Ivy League schools of his aspirations because he can't deal with the pressure. This is not factual. When my son did take the tests, he always scored in high 3s or 4s. Our decision to opt him out had less to do with his capacity as a learner as it did us exercising a right we have to not create undue stress for something that won't even inform his classroom performance in that year.

**Standardized tests**, whether state or national are meant to norm student learning, but this is flawed even in its conception. These exams are often skewed and favor those who have the means to be successful on them. And let's not even get into the kinds of bias that exist in the kinds of questions asked or the passages presented in terms of student experience based on their location and life experience.

We, unfortunately, live in a world that wants to label everything for the sake of comparison instead of seeing each learner as an individual who has something positive to work with. In educational institutions, it is our job to make sure all students get the learning they need to be prepared for the paths they will choose later and not every child should be doing the same thing. That isn't how society works either.

No two people can fit into the same boxes in a multiple choice test and by using these methods of assessment, we are reducing children and young adults to **quantifiable measures for efficiency** and ease. That doesn't seem a good enough reason and this, of course, is oversimplifying the folks who are making money off of these endeavors as well as **institutions being held accountable** using them. Very few people win with this equation no matter how smart they are.

Schools and educational institutions from k-12 and higher need to re-evaluate **how students are being assessed**, well beyond the state testing. Inconsistent grading practices and expectations are rampant in most schools, greatly watering down what those scores actually mean.

As a profession we need to take the reins back here and ask ourselves what we are hoping to get out of these experiences. What do we value

As a profession, we need to take the reins back here and ask ourselves what we are hoping to get out of these experiences. What do we value for students and how is that being communicated.

There are many other ways of assessing student learning that is more indicative of actual experiences than tests. If our goal is truly to know what students know and can do, we should be providing multiple opportunities for them to show it. We should be giving them opportunities to regularly reflect and self-assess against an agreed upon criteria. They should know what success looks like before they start and have a plan to achieve it that suits their path.

Yes, I agree that students need to be challenged in ways that push them outside of their comfort zones at times, but we also have to listen to them more. **Portfolio assessment** aligned with project-based learning is one example of getting more student voice and choice into our understanding of their learning. Teaching students to articulate their learning will help them and help us get them to where they need to be.

Granted, it's not just the assessments that are broken, but the system needs more than an upgrade; it's time for us to dismantle what is and start from scratch with a system that will suit our current world and not the industrial one that our current system was born in.

*What does assessment look like in your classes, schools? Does it truly reflect student learning? How do you know? Please share*

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