

[Education Week's blogs](#) > Curriculum Matters

Vermont Board of Education Blasts Misuse of Standardized Tests

By [Catherine Gewertz](#) on August 26, 2014 2:01 PM

Education officials in Vermont are pretty fed up with standardized testing.

The state board of education has released a [set of guiding principles for Vermont's use of standardized tests](#), but it could double as an attack on nearly everything about that method of gauging student learning.

"The way in which standardized tests have been used under federal law as almost the single measure of school quality has resulted in the frequent misuse of these instruments across the nation," the board's statement said. It calls on Congress to amend the No Child Left Behind Act to "reduce testing mandates, promote multiple forms of evidence of student learning and school quality, eschew the use of student test scores in evaluating educators, and allow flexibility that reflects the unique circumstances of all states."

While it is part of a state's obligation to report to the public on its schools' work, those reports should be on "a diverse and comprehensive set of school quality indicators in local school, faculty, and community communications," the board's principles say.

The Vermont board was sharply critical of the use of cutoff scores to make judgments about schools or students.

"While the federal government continues to require the use of subjectively determined, cut-off scores, employing such metrics lacks scientific foundation," the guidelines say. "The skills needed for success in society are rich and diverse. Consequently, there is no single point on a testing scale that has proven accurate in measuring the success of a school or in measuring the talents of an individual. Claims to the contrary are technically indefensible and their application would be unethical."

The board's action comes just weeks after new test results found nearly every school in Vermont failing to meet No Child Left Behind proficiency requirements. Those results prompted Vermont Education Secretary [Rebecca Holcombe to write a letter to parents and caregivers](#) in which she blasted the "broken NCLB policy" that places standardized tests at the heart of judgments about schools.

The board wants Holcombe to lead the way to a new accountability system that would have a downsized role for standardized testing.

But Vermont is in a bit of a bind: It could have proposed a new kind of accountability system if it had obtained a waiver from No Child Left Behind. But it is one of the few states that chose not to seek a waiver, in part because it didn't want to be required to evaluate its teachers based on their students' test scores. So it's stuck with the accountability system enshrined in the 2002 NCLB law, which means it has to classify schools as failing if all their students don't meet proficiency targets.

It should be added, however, that even going the waiver route wouldn't have relieved Vermont of the obligation to test students annually. No state has been excused from that requirement; at least not yet.

With its statement, the Vermont board is trying hard to push the state in a new direction. It still plans to use the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium tests this spring, board chairman Stephan Morse told me. But clearly, it's looking down the line to see what it can do about measuring student learning differently, and holding itself accountable for student learning in different ways.

Categories: [Testing](#)

Tags: [assessment](#) [No Child Left Behind](#) [testing](#)