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Contributors to this newsletter included: Bonnie Wilkerson Peter Hendrickson, Sherry Rose-Bond, Mike Flicek, Steve Schellenberg and George Olson.

## NATD President's Column

### NCLB, Standards and School Improvement – What's Next?

Bonnie Wilkerson

NATD President 2006-07

The year is ripe with promise as we look ahead to the reauthorization of NCLB, and look behind us at the harvest of the impact of the law in its current form. That harvest will be at the center of the robust debates that surely must occur before the drafting of a reauthorization.

Recalling the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education act, soon officially named the No Child Left Behind Act, we remember a united Congress, voting for a concept that was inarguable; that not only would no child be neglected in the education process, but also, that all children would succeed. Many of us, in positions that are crucial in the testing process and in the process of communicating not only the new law, but also individual, school, and district performance in terms of the legislation, can remember exactly where we were when we got the news of NCLB.

The harvest has included increased student achievement, improved schools. It has also included good schools, working against nearly impossible odds, caught in the vortex with schools that truly needed to be reconstituted to begin to be effective. We have seen schools required to give choice to students to attend higher achieving schools, when there were not options for them to choose. We have seen schools reconstituted because they were not making swift enough progress, and the result was a step back to "beginning again." We have seen the devastating effects of being called a "failing" school.

How much of NCLB in its current form is based on a belief that schools and teachers are not doing all they could be doing? How long can improvement accrue from that perspective? If indeed we can always do better, then sanctions to push for that better performance can have an impact. But the threshold is low. The benefit ends. What next? Who has considered that the 2014 target of 100% insures that all schools will fail? For high achieving schools the challenge is twofold; improve performance consistently by modifying, refining, targeting instruction; then, work to be the last school standing. The bottom line is that 100% is a goal only achievable through selective membership or a reduction in standard performance expectations.

State tests measure performance against standards. The quality, depth, and meaningfulness of the standards are the determiners in this system of the quality, depth and meaningfulness of student learning. So far, the law is about test performance, not the quality of standards being tested. Will this be a sparring point in the reauthorization debate? If so, it will be a deep debate. The issue of state's rights versus federal authority has never provided calm terrain. States have not been reticent in opposing processes that they disagree with in NCLB. For example, Nebraska has been fighting the system since its inception, not fighting to opt out, but fighting to use a system that measures growth in student performance rather than status. Kansas made headlines for exploring abandonment of NCLB, demonstrating growing discontent to the extent of considering opting out.

Each state has its own story, and the questions that are current are these. How will the 2007 reauthorization be different than the 2001 legislation? Will the lessons learned as states have struggled to implement, challenge, change or step away from the law be instructive? Can the intention of the law, to insure that all children receive an adequate education through a system of monitoring progress, be realized through a reauthorized NCLB? NATD addresses issues of NCLB in the NATD/NCME Symposium in Chicago in April. Sherry Rose-Bond has developed a symposium which presents a forum for discussion of the effects of NCLB from multiple perspectives. The effects of NCLB vary by audience, but are of importance in each context. The current year is a year of opportunity regarding NCLB. Listening to the voices of those who are affected means listening to us all. We must enter into the debates at every opportunity so that our

voices can help legislators make informed choices that lead to the success of all children.

Bonnie Wilkerson is Assistant Superintendent for Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment in Northbrook, Illinois. A long-time principal before she became the Director of Research, Evaluation and Assessment in Illinois's second largest school district, her experiences as an educator span the spectrum from poverty to affluence. Beginning in a tiny rural school district in Texas she had the joy of teaching children from impoverished homes, and learned a lot about herself in the process. Currently working in a highly affluent, high-achieving community, she has embraced the opportunity to engage in educational improvement processes to drive achievement even higher.

## **Nominations Sought for Certificates of Recognition**

In 2003, the NATD Board of Directors established an award to recognize one or two individuals per year who have made outstanding professional contributions in the area of applied educational assessment in schools. In previous years, Ed Drahozal, Carole Perlman, Steve Henry, James Bray, Joe Hansen, James Popham, and Joe O'Reilly have been honored with this award.

Award recipients can be nominated from any areas in educational assessment including but not limited to measurement theory, promotion of best practices, teaching

of measurement and assessment, and use of assessment information for curriculum, instruction, policy making and communication with stakeholders.

The NATD membership is encouraged to nominate deserving individuals for this award. Please send your nominations, along with supporting material, to:

Michael Strozeski  
Assistant Superintendent  
Accountability and Student Services  
469-593-0240  
[Mike.Strozeski@richardson.k12.tx.us](mailto:Mike.Strozeski@richardson.k12.tx.us)

## Nominations Sought for NATD Leadership Positions

In spring, 2006, NATD members will elect a vice-president, a secretary and one board member. As established in the NATD constitution the vice-president will serve in that position for one year before ascending to the presidency to be followed by a third year as immediate past-president. The secretary position is for a two-year term and the board position is a four year commitment.

If you would like to nominate yourself or another NATD member for any one of these positions, please submit your suggestion to Dr. Peter Hendrickson, immediate past-president, prior to December 1. You may phone him at (425)385-4057, e-mail him at [phendrickson@everett.wednet.edu](mailto:phendrickson@everett.wednet.edu), or send snail mail to 4730 Colby Ave., Everett, WA 98203.

## Some New Tools on the Web

Some members recently received notice through the Division H listserv of two search engines for finding resources in educational research. I have tried both of them and can give this brief overview.

<http://edres.org/> - This is a search engine that provides easy access to no-cost, full-text education-related documents on the Web, including on-line journals, the ERIC database, and some other web-accessible research reports. It operates on a key-word search and is very fast. However, a key-word search requires a certain amount of skill and patience because if the search criteria are either too narrow or too broad, the most important references might be hard to find.

<http://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/> - This British search engine provides a little more help to the user in that it allows you to specify a search by user, subject area or title. Also, when fed a broad category (e.g. reading), it will return a list of subcategories for the user's selection. It appears to tap into a narrower database, being primarily devoted to the work of British researchers. Finally, the

user needs to be careful to use British spellings and usage.

Many of you may also be aware of the online book review journal coordinated by Gene Glass - <http://edrev.asu.edu/>. Reviews can be searched by book author, book title, or review author. Reviews are categorized into "brief reviews" and "essay reviews". There is no index by subject matter and, given the number of reviews on the site, that would be a formidable task. There is also a section for reviews of books in Spanish and Portuguese. Reviewers volunteer to review a specific book, so some important books do not get reviewed, but the reviews that I have read are scholarly and detailed. For example, the review of Gerry Bracey's *Reading Educational Research: How to Avoid Getting Statistically Snookered* (2006), while generally complimentary, also points out some inconsistencies and technical errors in Bracey's examples.

-Steve Schellenberg

## **JCTP Notes: Joint Committee on Testing Practices**

### **ISO or No? A Standard for Educational and Psychological Testing**

Members of the Joint Committee on Testing Practices (JCTP) and others gave testimony on a proposed international standard for testing in late September at a Washington, D.C. informational meeting hosted by the American National Standards Institute (ANSI).

Some months ago the German Psychological Society petitioned the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) to have the ISO begin the process of developing international standards for proficiency assessment in industrial/organizational settings. JCTP as well as the American Psychological Association (APA) had provided comment to the ANSI, the U.S representative to ISO, discouraging adoption of the German proposal last spring. Subsequently, the ISO voted to adopt the German proposal although ANSI voted against the proposal.

JCTP member Sharon Goldsmith, representing the American Speech and Hearing Association, reported that the current concern related to the approval of the German proposal is that if the ISO adopts the German proposal as the

international standard for proficiency assessment, the U.S. Dept. of Commerce could direct ANSI to adopt it as the U.S. standard as well.

ISO is in the process of convening a working group of ISO members to study and recommend a future course of action on this issue.

### **ABCs of School Testing—Revision Considered**

The JCTP has discussed sponsoring a revision of the ABCs of School Testing, the video and presentation leader's guide tailored for parents. With the advent of NCLB and higher testing frequency, new content is needed. NATD Board members further suggested that a different format might be appropriate for the update. JCTP will soon be asked to authorize a working group to revise the product.

### **A Comprehensive Testing Website**

The JCTP is considering reconstruction of the website to become a reference desk and clearinghouse for questions about testing policy and practice. NATD members are invited to comment on desired characteristics by contacting Peter Hendrickson, NATD Past President at phendrickson@everett.wednet.edu.

AERA/NCME/NATD/DRE meetings  
Chicago – April 8-13, 2007

The table below reflects our current understanding of dates, times and venues for AERA, NCME, NATD and DRE.

Sun., Apr. 8	all day	DRE (Directors of Research and Evaluation) meeting	location TBA
Mon., Apr. 9	a.m.	NATD breakfast NATD business meeting	location TBA
	noon	AERA meeting begins	convention hotels
	evening	NATD Board meeting	
Tues., Apr. 10	all day	NCME meeting begins	convention hotels
	(tentative)	NATD Symposium – see facing page for details	convention hotels
	evening	NATD Dinner hosted by test publishers	location TBA
Wed., Apr. 11	a.m.	NCME breakfast	convention hotels
Thurs., Apr. 12	a.m.	AERA Division H breakfast/business meeting	convention hotels
	all day	last day of NCME meeting	convention hotels
	evening	Division H Social	location TBA
Fri., Apr. 13	all day	last day of AERA meeting	convention hotels

A more detailed schedule will appear in the spring newsletter

The convention hotels are the Hyatt Regency Chicago, the Sheraton Chicago Hotel and Towers, and the Marriott Chicago Downtown Magnificent Mile.

***“NCLB: Changing it; Fixing it; Living with it.”***

As NCLB is scheduled for re-authorization in 2007, this seems to be the appropriate time to look back at what we have achieved so far and to look ahead at what we still need to do. We will examine the effects of NCLB from a variety of perspectives, many previously receiving little attention. We will begin by presenting an overview of the results of state achievement tests across the nation, with particular emphasis on the results of subgroups and on the comparison of the results to NAEP. We will next examine the direct effect NCLB has had on a typical state department of education as it works to carry out both federal and state mandates and to provide direction and support to individual school districts. We will look at the effects NCLB has had on a very high-performing school district, a frequently ignored population. Finally, we will look at the relationship of business and industry to public education both in terms of educational partnerships and enlightened self-interest.

**PRESENTERS:** Robert L. Linn, Co-Director of CRESST and Distinguished Professor Emeritus of Education, University of Colorado at Boulder;

Judy Feil, Director of Assessment, Ohio Department of Education;

David J. Kroeze, Superintendent, Northbrook (Ill.) School District 27;

Barbara A. Boyd, Community Partnership Officer, Loaned Executive to Columbus (Oh.) Public Schools, Nationwide Mutual Insurance Company

**DISCUSSANT:** Glynn D. Ligon, President and CEO. ESP Solutions Group

**CHAIR:** Sherry Rose-Bond, Executive Director for Accountability and Testing, Columbus (Oh.) Public Schools

**Book Review:**  
***Mastering Assessment, A Self-Service System for Educators***

By W. James Popham

Reviewed by Peter Hendrickson

Jim Popham's newest book is not a textbook, but a series of 15 slim booklets, each on a different assessment topic targeted at teachers, not grad students. These booklets are written for use in schools for staff development. In our district they would work well in professional learning communities where each faculty member would be responsible for presenting one topic over the course of several weeks.

The booklets are color coded and Popham envisions one or two sittings each. In less formal settings they could be "pluck and peruse". In more formal presentation a leader could guide or teach all the discussions. You'll not find practice exercises, end of chapter quizzes, an index or lengthy reference sections. Instead each booklet has a few guiding anticipated understandings, a brief glossary and short reference list (including 2006 citations.)

The writing is classic Popham, light, witty and tongue-in-cheek. If this was a "Name That Author" contest, most assessment directors would easily peg this as a Popham publication. His bias for instruction which emphasizes mastery of a few key learnings plays out in the rubrics booklet where he states, the "most important factor in making a teacher's instruction effective is clarity of curricular intent."

It would be helpful to have these booklets at hand when briefing reporters who are doing the annual SAT release story or when there is doubt about the reliability of scoring the state writing tests. They could also serve as a quick primer for a Board of Directors presentation. Job descriptions for test directors would wisely include mastery of the topics included in *Mastering Assessment* and many test directors would be well-served to brush up on skills with a read of the booklets.

The booklets are:

**Appropriate and Inappropriate Tests for Evaluating Schools**

A history of accountability is offered with a critique of large scale norm referenced and standards-based tests both of which he claims are instructionally insensitive. Popham touts the current Wyoming efforts as a counter example.

**Assessing Students' Affect**

Likert's classic 1932 article is referenced. Popham warns of the perils in measuring affect, while agreeing that affect is important as is anonymity of responses.

**Assessing Students with Disabilities**

NCLB's impact is clearly stated as it is throughout the booklets. He is critical of subgroup size variability across the states. He promotes use of the CCSSO Accommodations Manual.

**Assessment Bias: How to Banish It**

One of the more technical booklets, this contains a nuanced discussion of DIF and sources of test bias.

### **Classroom Evidence of Successful Teaching**

A few more references would've been helpful in this booklet as the topic is at the heart of considerable activity in every state. Popham provides sobering advice about the difficulties in measuring growth for individual students and provides a "split-and-switch" design as a replacement for pre/post-test designs.

### **College Entrance Examinations: The SAT and the ACT**

Popham highlights the irony that a purpose of the SAT was to counter the advantage of students from affluent families, the very students who can afford expensive test-prep classes.

### **Constructed-Response Tests: Building and Bettering**

See-also balloons direct readers to other booklets for this topic, as these booklets are not entirely independent. Cartoons provide yet another source of humor in navigating item writing difficulties. Time to score and accurate scoring are noted as drawbacks to these items.

### **How Testing Can Help Teaching**

Assessment for learning gets its due and student engagement is highlighted with purposes for testing along the instructional timeline clearly noted.

### **Interpreting the Results of Large-Scale Assessments**

This rather standard treatment of technical measurement terms is as close as the booklets get to a classic textbook, but Popham's humor leavens the writing.

### **Portfolio Assessment and Performance Testing**

The step-by-step guide to portfolios and continuum of tasks defining performances provides quick guides for teachers. There is the customary clear advice about student involvement in generating evaluative criteria.

### **Reliability: What Is It and Is It Really Necessary?**

Another fairly technical booklet, this one even includes a formula for SEM.

### **The Role of Rubrics in Testing and Teaching**

The rubrics booklet is included in the publisher's review packet and contains enough practical advice to both get started and to provoke a rich seminar discussion.

### **Selected-Response Tests: Building and Bettering**

Popham acknowledges that multiple choice items can elicit high level thinking but that writing good items is hard work. Like most authors, he provides lists (commandments) of dos and don'ts. He avoids the debate about two vs. three distractors. References are provided for more in-depth guidance. (Haladyna, 2004).

### **Test Preparation Sensible or Sordid?**

In this high stakes testing environment, Popham persists in respecting both the integrity and efforts of teachers, claiming that ignorance rather than dishonesty taints test preparation. The emeritus UCLA professor continues his drumbeat against instructionally insensitive tests.

### **Validity: Assessment's Cornerstone**

The years teaching graduate students emerge with the clarity of examples around this topic. "Assessment validity refers to the accuracy of score-based inferences," he states after a visualization exercise.

**Publication Data:** *Mastering Assessment, A Self-Service System for Educators* by W. James Popham, 2006. Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, NYC, NY. Paperbound, boxed, 15 booklets, 32 pages each, \$149. ISBN 0-415-95240-9. Web [www.taylorandfrancisgroup.com](http://www.taylorandfrancisgroup.com)

Peter Hendrickson is an assessment specialist with Everett (WA) Public Schools and Past President of NATD.

## Wyoming's Approach to Changing State Test Cut-Scores

By Michael Flicek

*The new Wyoming assessment, the Proficiency Assessment for Wyoming Students (PAWS), was field tested in spring 2005 and operationally administered during spring 2006. The previous assessment, the Wyoming Comprehensive Assessment of Wyoming Students (WyCAS), tested students in grade 4, 8, and 11, using a matrix sampling design and had proficiency cut-scores that were intentionally established to mirror those on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). The purpose of the cut-scores was to inform school improvement and there was no implication that students who were not proficient needed special programming. With the implementation of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), the purpose of cut-scores on the Wyoming test changed. Since NCLB calls for 100% of students to be proficient, there is a clear implication that students who are not proficient need special programming to help them become proficient.*

*During August through October 2005, teacher panels met to use the bookmarking method of standard setting. They recommended cut-scores in grades 4, 6, 8, and 11 in reading, math, and writing on the PAWS that were intended for the new purpose of NCLB. The cut-score recommended in grade 11 math were actually higher than the cut-scores used on the WyCAS. In all other cases, recommended cut-scores were lower than those used on the WyCAS.*

*The State Superintendent of Public Instruction has the authority to establish cut-scores. He followed the recommendation of the PAWS Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) and established a Blue Ribbon Panel to consider the teacher recommendations for cut-scores and to advise him on the appropriate level of cut-scores for the new test. The Blue Ribbon Panel was chaired by TAC member, Jim Popham and met in June in Jackson Hole for a 2 day session. The outcome of the session was recommendations to guide the Superintendent in his decision. Panel members included the Governor of Wyoming, the President of the University of Wyoming, the head of community colleges in Wyoming, the Business Council Chairman, legislators, and state board of education members. During the first of 2 days, members of the TAC presented to the panel members and facilitated a discussion of the issues related to cut-scores for proficiency. Each TAC member prepared a brief paper that was provided to panel members in advance. Jim Popham's paper was on instructionally supportive state assessments, Jim Pelligrino presented a paper on the relevance and importance of NAEP cut-scores to the decision at hand (i.e., he concluded that there is good reason to think that an appropriate proficient cut-score for NCLB purposes would probably fall somewhere between Basic and Proficient on the NAEP), Rebecca Kopriva presented on a method for improving the information value of wrong answers on the PAWS to inform instruction, I presented a paper on the distinction between being "at grade level" versus being "proficient", and David Berliner presented a paper on the role of judgments in establishing cut-scores. Dr. Berliner put forth the "Goldilocks Standard", which was a plea for a standard that is "just right" as opposed to one that is "too stringent" or "too lenient". What follows is my paper for the Blue Ribbon Panel.*

### **Proficient Versus At Grade Level**

The press and general public often make the assumption that being “proficient” means the same thing as being “at grade level”. Proficient can be viewed as an aspiration for where students *ought* to be at particular grade levels. Teachers who write standards are expressing their aspirations for students. Panels of teachers who use those standards in recommending cut-scores on state tests further express aspirations. Different people have different aspirations. This is one reason the skills needed to be proficient are so different across the 50 states. In contrast to an aspiration, being *at grade level* was once determined by empirical means. Specifically, a representative national sample of students at a particular grade level would respond to items on a test. Subsequent students taking that test were considered to be *at grade level* when the score they earned was the same as the average score from that representative sample of students. All students above the national sample’s average score were considered to be *above average*. The level of achievement skills needed to be proficient based on aspirations could be quite different than the level of skills that were empirically determined to be *at grade level*.

Furthermore, students at any particular grade level will have skills that vary considerably from the lowest to highest performing students. This variability in scores within a grade level is called a distribution of scores. Typically most students score in the middle of the distribution. The empirical definition of *at grade level* can be expanded from a simple point on that distribution (i.e., the average score) to a range of scores. For example, we could conclude that students with scores in the middle third of the distribution had scored *at grade level*. Students with scores in the bottom third of the distribution would then be considered to have scored below grade level and those with scores above middle third of the distribution would be considered to have scored above grade level. Using this definition of *at grade level*, about 66% of students (i.e., those in the middle and top thirds of the distribution combined) would be at or above grade level.

### **Evidence from Wyoming**

In 2004 Wyoming administered a “standards-based” test (i.e., the WyCAS) and the TerraNova to students in grades 4, 8, and 11. The TerraNova is a standardized test with a representative national sample. Using the 2004 results for Natrona County I will illustrate how the previous aspirations of Wyoming educators for their students (as represented by *proficient* scores on the WyCAS) related to an empirical definition of *at grade level* (i.e., as represented by the nationally representative norm sample on the TerraNova). Students were identified as proficient in reading and math if they had a scale score of at least 240 on the relevant WyCAS subtest. Natrona County tested about 900 students in each of the three tested grades. Using a statistical method called regression I was able to identify the scores on the TerraNova that were equivalent to scale scores of 240 on the WyCAS.

On the TerraNova math test, grade 4 students in Natrona who scored higher than 80% of students in the nationally representative sample had a score equivalent to the WyCAS proficient score. Grade 8 and 11 students needed TerraNova math scores that were higher than 69% and 65%, respectively, of students in the national sample to have a score that was equivalent to a proficient score on the WyCAS. On the TerraNova reading test, students in grades 4, 8, and 11 needed to score higher than 67%, 67%, and 60%, respectively, of students in the national sample to score in the WyCAS proficient range (see Figures 1, 2, & 3).

Thus, using the empirical definition of *above grade level*, many students in Natrona County who were *above grade level* did not have proficient scores on the TerraNova. Using the empirical approach that defined *at grade level* as a range encompassing students with scores in the middle third of the distribution, nearly all of the Natrona County students with TerraNova scores in the *at grade level* range had TerraNova scores that were equivalent to WyCAS *below proficient* scores. Virtually all students in Natrona County with TerraNova scores equivalent to WyCAS proficient scores, scored in an *above average* range on the TerraNova. You can see that getting 100% of students to the WyCAS *proficient*

level, as would be required by NCLB by 2014, would require Natrona County to vastly exceed the Lake Wobegon standard.

### **Purpose of the Cut-Score**

Panels of teachers have recommended cut-scores by comparing test items or student work with a description of the skills that are in the standards. I have experienced this judgment process to yield one cut-score when the purpose of the cut-score was to inform school improvement and a different cut-score when the purpose was to hold schools accountable for student proficiency. Different cut-scores were recommended even when the descriptions of skills that students at the cut-score should have were identical. Because of NCLB, the purpose of cut-scores on the PAWS is quite different than it was on the WyCAS (i.e., to inform school improvement). On the PAWS, the cut-scores should be set at a challenging level that it would be reasonable for 100% of students to achieve by 2014.

*Wyoming is doing the right thing in the right way* by engaging in a new cut-score setting process for the PAWS to address the new purpose for cut-scores. The process Wyoming is using is to be commended. First, standard setting panels of teachers compared test items with very detailed descriptions of what the standards indicated that students should be able to do at the tested grade levels. Teachers are not policy makers, however. Recommendations from teacher panels will now be provided to state policy makers. Policy makers (i.e., the Blue-Ribbon Panel) must now consider the recommendations of the teacher panels and make the required policy recommendation.

### **Implications for the Wyoming Schools**

Wyoming educators are being challenged by NCLB to move the entire distribution of student test scores higher. The cut-scores are especially important because NCLB requires us to have 100% of students proficient or above. The instructionally supportive and sensitive nature of the PAWS is unique and will facilitate our efforts to meet this challenge. The decision of the Blue-Ribbon Panel will establish the level of challenge before us.

*When the Blue Ribbon Panel had concluded its work, the State Superintendent had the guidance needed to establish cut-scores on the PAWS. As this is being written the new cut-scores have not yet been made public. The cut-scores are more appropriate for the NCLB purpose for which they will be used. The process that was used to arrive at the cut-scores provides a model for other states that have state test cut-scores that are not appropriate given the purpose of NCLB. The decision to adjust cut-scores requires courage in a politically charged environment. Wyoming policy makers are to be commended for stepping up to the plate in a bipartisan fashion and doing the right thing.*

- A more complete version of this article has been posted on the NATD web site –  
<http://wws.natd.org>

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