

United Methodist Women
Western North Carolina Conference

**PUBLIC EDUCATION INITIATIVE
PANEL DISCUSSION**

Annual Meeting
Lake Junaluska

Saturday Afternoon Session
September 6, 2008

TEACHER

Choose from the responses below to answer your questions. Feel free to add additional information you may have from other experiences.

How has No Child Left Behind affected your daily teaching practices?

NCLB has forced me to no longer focus on the skills that my students will need for daily life (for example: counting out the correct change to the cashier), and it has made me “teach the test.” They are basically memorizing skills needed to pass the test, and they do not have enough time to truly master the skills. Also, it has taken all of the fun out of elementary school because there is no time for unit extensions and art projects.

With No Child Left Behind, we have to make sure the students are proficient in test taking skills. I routinely give multiple choice tests as a way to practice that skill and a daily word problem to help zero in on strategies to use when attacking word problems.

The kindergarten teachers are teaching curriculum not that used to be introduced in first grade. There is so much pressure put on the students to perform and prepare for the dreaded test. They have to start early. They cannot wait until they might actually be developmentally ready.

I feel constantly “under the gun,” and I am very limited to the amount of fun learning activities I can do in my classroom. I feel a sense of guilt if I stray slightly away from the SCS because I might not cover each bit of information to the fullest in order for my students to pass the EOG.

How much time do you spend per year preparing your students for testing (example: practicing sample test items, times tests, etc.)?

I would say that 98% of my year is spent preparing my students for testing. We are in school 7 ½ hours per day. Four hours per day is spent on math and reading so my students can pass the K-2 assessment. That leaves 3 hours per day for 30 minutes of science, 30 minutes of social studies, 45 minutes of writing, 25 minutes for lunch, 30 minutes for recess, 45 minutes of special class, and 15 minutes of spelling. If you do the math, there simply is not enough time to get it all in.

It actually starts day 1, but in earnest after Christmas through May.

We administer two and sometimes three practice EOG tests. The tests are in both math and reading and are approximately 90 minutes each. Fifth grade also takes a practice test in science. After each practice test, we review the questions and discuss mistakes.

The kindergarten teachers are exposing the children to assessments every quarter, probably spending about 3 of the nine weeks testing and 6 weeks teaching.

SCHOOL ADMINISTRATOR

Choose from the responses below to answer your questions. Feel free to add additional information you may have from past experiences.

How has No Child Left Behind affected the daily teaching practices of your teachers?

Our teachers feel much more pressure to use time effectively. Whereas a year ago, a teacher might digress from the lesson to address social or emotional issues of his or her students, he is now less likely to do so. Teachers have lost much of the interpersonal relationships with students because they have to concentrate on their lessons.

The curriculum is very broad and has many topics to teach at a grade level. There is little time for projects that enriched the students' knowledge and love of subject matter.

Teachers have much more accountability to administrators. Teachers submit lesson plans, unit plans and have weekly meetings with colleagues to plan together. There is instructional support from central office, and the state consultant comes to monitor progress weekly. Someone is always coming in the classrooms to observe. This has been good in some ways, but in others, it can make teachers feel on edge.

How much time do you think that your teachers spend per year preparing their students for testing (practicing sample test items, timed tests, etc.)?

In the middle school pacing guide, there are two weeks prior to the EOG test set aside for test preparation. Throughout the year, teachers embed standardized test questions in their classroom assessments and assignments without teaching them in isolation. If they follow the NC Standard Course of Study objectives, they are preparing students for the test all year long.

LEGISLATOR

Choose from the responses below to answer your questions. Feel free to add additional information you may have from past experiences.

What is your position on No Child Left Behind?

Senator Gregg from New Hampshire and I introduced the bill in 2007 that will reauthorize the No Child Left Behind law. Obviously I am a huge supporter of No Child Left Behind. I want to see improvement in the education of our students in North Carolina. I am interested particular in improving the number of students who graduate from high school and go on to college. This kind of program can help our students contribute to North Carolina's economy. I believe that education is one of the biggest issues we face today.

Do you feel that No Child Left Behind has been adequately funded?

It is hard to say. There are always ways to put more dollars into programs. I want to see enough money put into No Child Left Behind so that all of the programs can be funded. As the bill goes through the legislative process, there will be changes. I understand that is just a part of the process.

SCHOOL BOARD MEMBER

Choose from the responses below to answer your questions. Feel free to add additional information you may have from past experiences.

Do you feel that the children in our schools are benefitting from the state testing program?

It is a problem. It works both ways. You can't lump all students together.

No. The state testing program is a farce, and it is adjusted yearly to make the overall education system look good regardless of the true results.

In that they are testing from the NC Standard Course of Study, it doesn't bother me that we are finding out what our students have learned. And it doesn't bother me that we are increasing the rigor of the tests by raising the number that shows proficiency. We need to have higher expectations for our standards of proficiency. I worry that some school folks might make this a bigger deal for the kids and make them more nervous than they need to be. I like the fact that our state testing program (the ABC's) shows growth rather than the No Child Left Behind all or nothing format.

What areas of study do you feel are overlooked because of the emphasis on testing and lack of funding and is this of concern to you?

Sciences and social studies. This is very much a concern to me in that our youth don't understand what their ancestors did to make this nation what it is, and they are not developing the backgrounds they need for more advanced classes in these areas.

I am also concerned about children coming to kindergarten unprepared. We have kids that have a 2-year-old vocabulary when they are 5 and starting school. Another area of concern is the retirement of many of our principals. Leadership in these two areas is crucial. We need to train parents to be their children's first teachers and we need to retain the strong school leadership that we'll be losing.

PARENT

Choose from the responses below to answer your questions. Feel free to add additional information you may have from past experiences.

What areas of study do you feel are overlooked because of the emphasis on testing and lack of funding and is this of concern to you?

Basic skills such as spelling, penmanship, and reading comprehension seem to not be of great importance. This a big concern of mine.

Science and social studies are short changed in elementary school. I am concerned because these are subjects that become more important in high school requirements and students don't have the background knowledge needed to be successful. They are also topics that children really love, especially for many boys.

I feel that teachers are now mainly teaching to the state test in order to meet the standards and requirements instituted by this bill.

How has the emphasis on testing affected your child?

My younger school-aged son has just entered 3rd grade, so he has not yet been affected. But I foresee stressful nights prior to testing because he will want to do well. My older daughter has been asked to relinquish a music class to get extra help in math. She has been emotionally affected by the pressures of testing. She has been tracked in average to low courses based on test scores, and I had to work very hard to get her in courses based on what I know about her potential overall, not on one test day.

Testing is a stressful time for all students even though they know the material. It is the fear of failing. For children who are not prepared or do not have family support, it is nightmarish!

COLLEGE INSTRUCTOR

Choose from the responses below to answer your questions. Feel free to add additional information you may have from past experiences.

How has the emphasis on testing that is a part of the No Child Left Behind act impacted the academic skill level of students whom you are currently teaching at the college level?

We are seeing more and more students going through our developmental programs. CVCC had to add a new lower level (MAT 050) math class because students were struggling with MAT 060. The course description for MAT 050 is as follows:

This course is designed to strengthen basic math skills. Topics include properties, rounding, estimating, comparing, converting, and computing whole numbers, fractions, and decimals. Upon completion, students should be able to perform basic computations and solve relevant mathematical problems.

MAT 060 description:

This course is a comprehensive study of mathematical skills which should provide a strong mathematical foundation to pursue further study. Topics include principles and applications of decimals, fractions, percents, ratio and proportion, order of operations, geometry, measurement, and elements of algebra and statistics. Upon completion, students should be able to perform basic computations and solve relevant, multi-step mathematical problems using technology where appropriate.

Of course, we also have developmental English, Reading and computer programs. These students are graduating from high school (some with honors) and coming to us unable to read, write or demonstrate basic math skills.

Just a few years ago our universities did not offer developmental courses. That was left up to the community colleges. Now our universities have found they must also offer these courses in order for their students to succeed.

Originally, the community college offered these classes for our students who had been out of school for many years and had decided to return. Most just needed to "brush up" on their skills. That is no longer the case.

COLLEGE INSTRUCTOR (Continued)

Have you noticed any areas of study that you feel are overlooked because of the emphasis on testing and lack of funding?

I'm horrified that many students no longer have an opportunity to take courses in music, language (in our global economy!?) and many other subjects that were required when I was in school. I understand that recess is even been cut out of some of the elementary schools! Social skills are learned on the playground and are just as important as "book learning".

My area of expertise is technology. I have hired part-time instructors from the public school system and am HORRIFIED by the stories I hear from these teachers. One (she's working on her Ph.D. in technology) told me her textbooks are eight years old!!! Eight year old technology should be forgotten. I have had to create a developmental computer class at my college because so many of our students are computer illiterate and cannot pass Introduction to Computers. I thought the class would fill up with older students, but I was wrong. I have a number of students right out of high school who can play games and "surf" the Net, but know nothing about computers.

STUDENT

Choose from the responses below to answer your questions. Feel free to add additional information you may have from past experiences.

How do you feel that testing affects your education?

I think it is important to test to see what you have learned, but it is not completely fair because you freeze up.

It makes you really study to know the stuff, but it makes students more stressed.

Teachers are better because their test scores are looked at for their classes.

What enhancement class would you like to see in your school that is not offered?

Different languages need to be offered to all students. The only one offered at my school is Spanish.

At the elementary level, I would like to see more specials like building. In high school, sign language would be good.