

**Young Children
and
Accountability:
No Easy Answers**

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'ISLAMOFASCISM'

ROSIE RETURNS

New Week

September 11, 2006

newweek.msnbc.com

The New First Grade

Are Kids Getting Pushed Too Fast, Too Soon?



Kindergarten less playful as pressure to achieve grows

By Karen Brandon

Tribune national correspondent

SAN DIEGO—Blocks, dolls and the toy kitchen were banned from Mary Lauren Tenney's kindergarten classroom last year in Knoxville, Tenn. But Tenney kept the blocks in defiance, arguing that, "For years, we told parents that children learn through play."

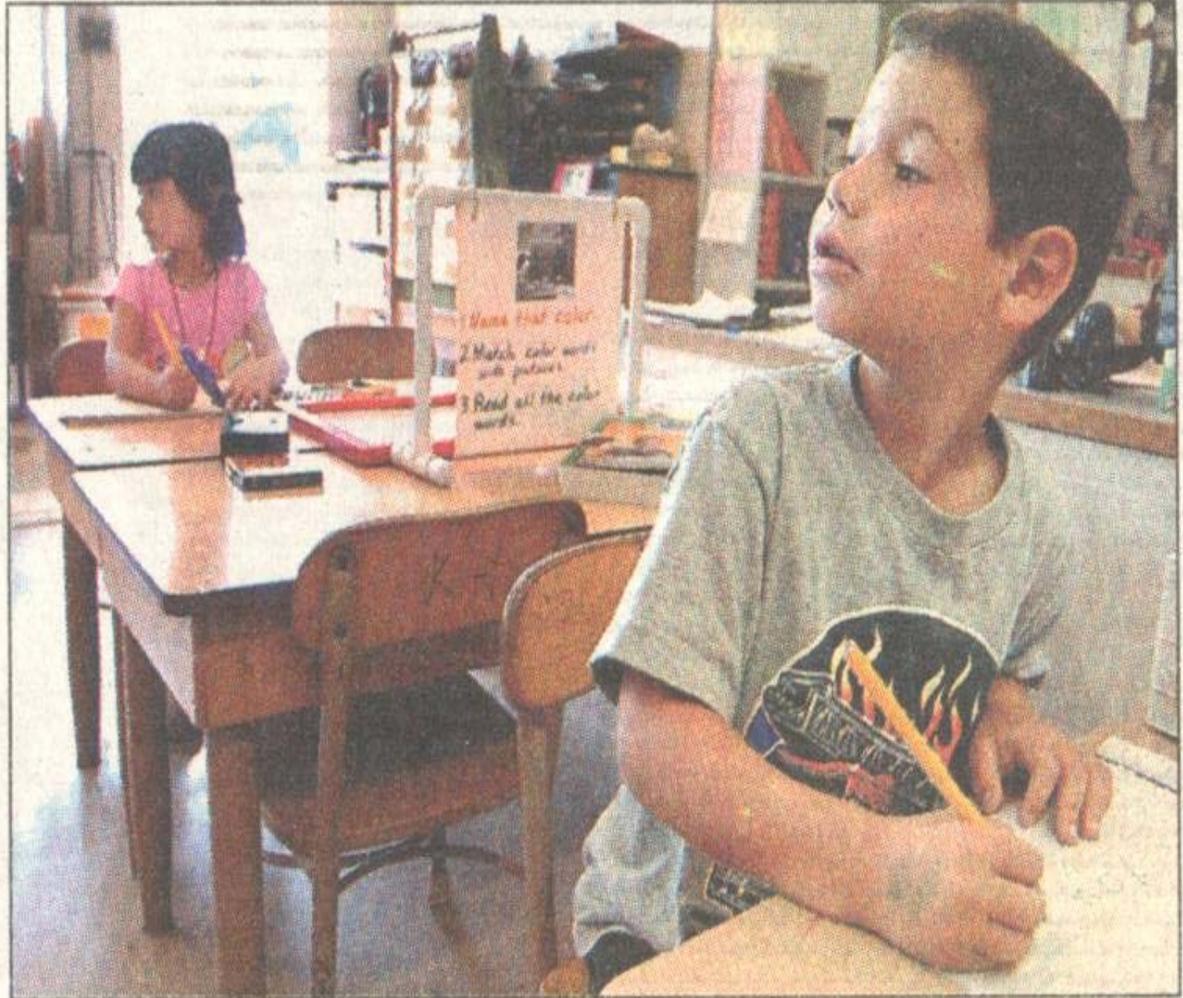


Photo for the Tribune by Denis Poroy
Kindergartners Gianvonna Poulin (left) and Farouk Essoussi learn to write in their San Diego classroom.

What Policymakers Want to Know Today

**"Are Children
Learning?"**

**"Are public funds being
used wisely?"**



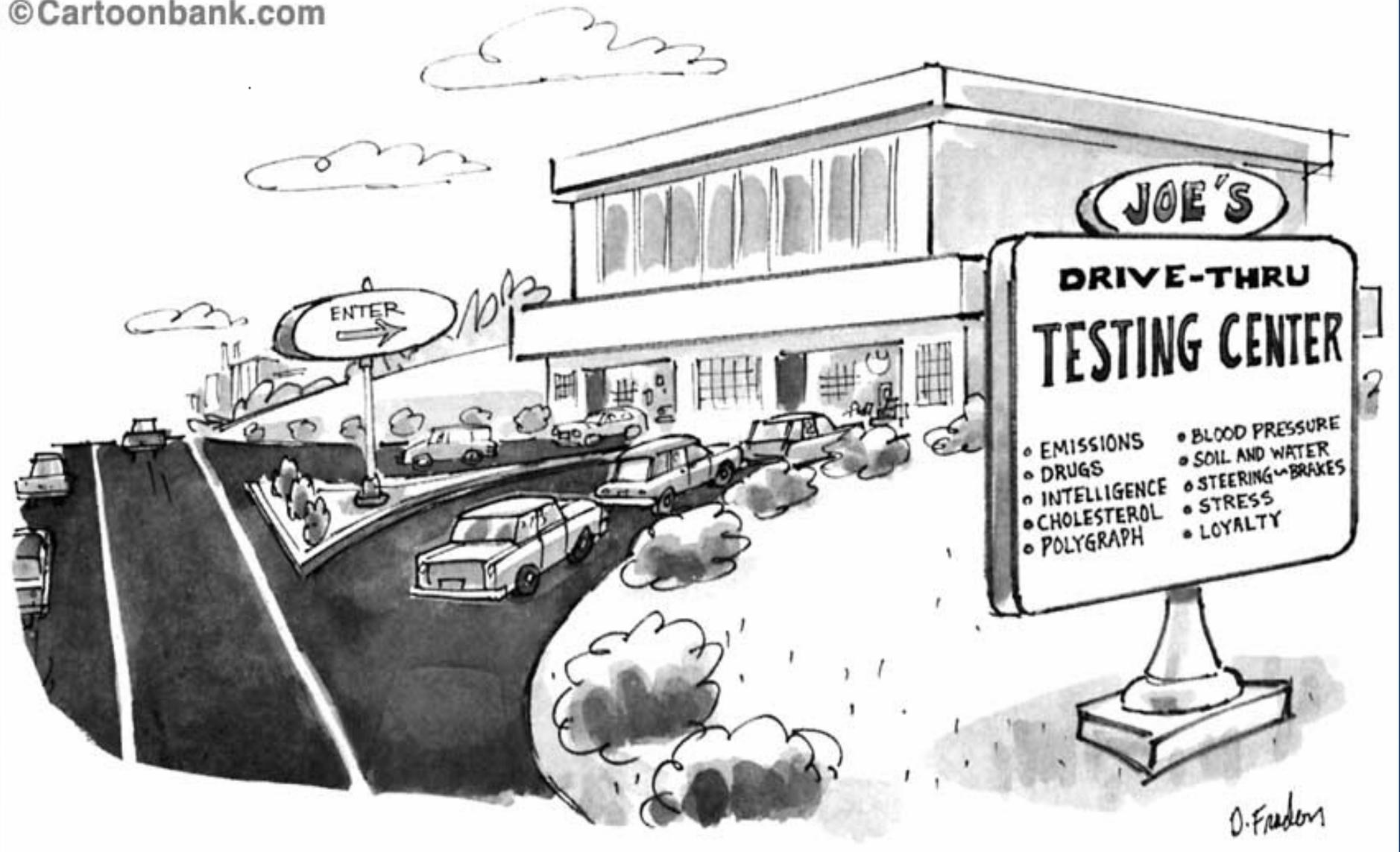
High-Stakes or High Standards?

“If you’re against high-stakes testing, it’s like being soft on crime. People are afraid of appearing soft on standards.”

—NY Assemblyman Ted Sanders (quoted in the *New York Times*, 6/15/05)

The “Easy Answers”

1. *“All we need is a good test to find out who’s ready for school.”*
2. *“If high-stakes tests are good enough for older kids, they’ll work for preschoolers too.”*



Problems with School Readiness Tests

- 1. Early development is episodic and uneven**
- 2. Social knowledge components are culturally-biased**
- 3. Concept of “readiness” is relative**
- 4. Test items often imply teaching**
- 5. Content is inconsistent with teachers’ views of school success**
- 6. Validity of the tests is poor**

Readiness

Within Context

“The appropriate policy question is not what children need to know or be able to do when they get to school, but what schools need to do to meet the social and educational needs of the children who walk through their doors.”

Deborah Stipek, 2001

*The **READY CHILD** Equation*

Ready Families +
Ready Communities +
Ready Services +
Ready Schools =

Ready Children

National School Readiness Indicators Initiative, 2005

***Can we evaluate the
quality of early
childhood programs
with
high-stakes tests?***

LESSONS

Jacques Steinberg

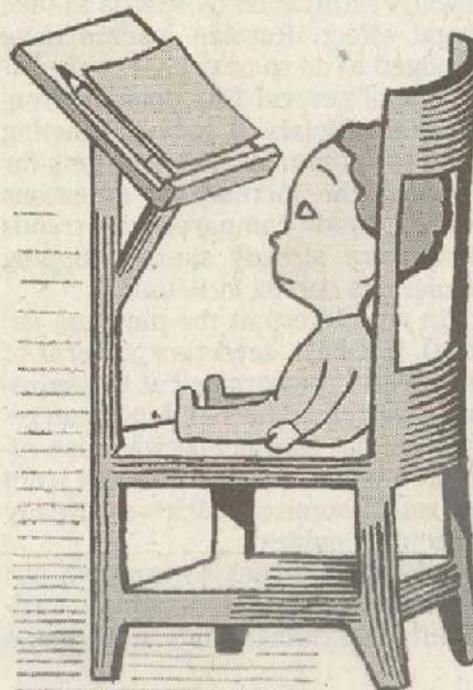
For Head Start Children, Their Turn at Testing

Starting next fall, the Bush administration intends to require each of the 500,000 4-year-olds in the federal Head Start program to sit for a standardized examination measuring such information as how many letters and numbers they can recognize, and whether they know how to hold a book right side up.

They will then take the same exam the following spring, to see how much progress they've made.

Those results will be used, at least in part, to determine whether the children's teachers are doing a good job — and whether the government should continue to finance that particular Head Start center.

Less than a year before the deadline to begin the testing, the administration has yet to decide how it is going to give those exams, or even what all will be on them.



David Suter

Head Start



National Reporting System

Direct Child Assessment

Fall 2003

List of Sections

Warm Up

- A. PreLAS – Simon Says
- B. PreLAS – Art Show
- C. PPVT (Adapted)
- D. Letter Naming
- E. Early Math Skills

Purposes of the National Reporting System

- 1. Program self-improvement**
- 2. Targeting training and technical assistance**
- 3. Program monitoring and accountability**

(Original Signature of Member)

110TH CONGRESS
1ST SESSION

H. R. _____

To reauthorize the Head Start Act, to improve program quality, to expand access, and for other purposes.

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Mr. KILDEE (for himself, Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California, and Mr. CASTLE) introduced the following bill; which was referred to the Committee on _____

A BILL

To reauthorize the Head Start Act, to improve program quality, to expand access, and for other purposes.

1 *Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representa-*
2 *tives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,*

3 SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

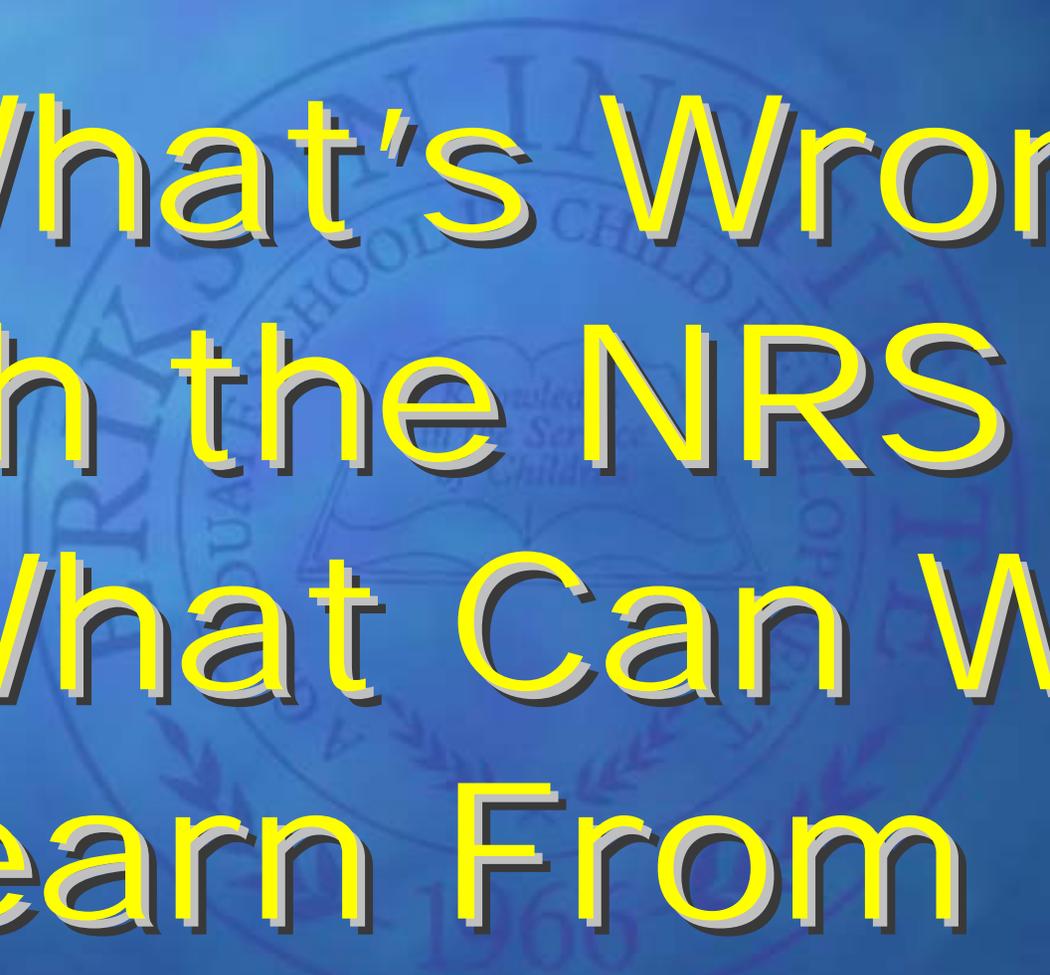
4 This Act may be cited as the "Improving Head Start
5 Act of 2007".

6 SEC. 2. STATEMENT OF PURPOSE.

7 Section 636 of the Head Start Act (42 U.S.C. 9831)
8 is amended to read as follows:

“(5) **SUSPENDED IMPLEMENTATION OF NATIONAL REPORTING SYSTEM.**—The Secretary shall

“(A) suspend implementation and terminate further development and use of the National Reporting System; and



What's Wrong
With the NRS and
What Can We
Learn From It?

Construct

Underrepresentation

The extent to which a test fails to capture important aspects of the construct it is intended to measure.

(AERA/APA/NCME, 1999)

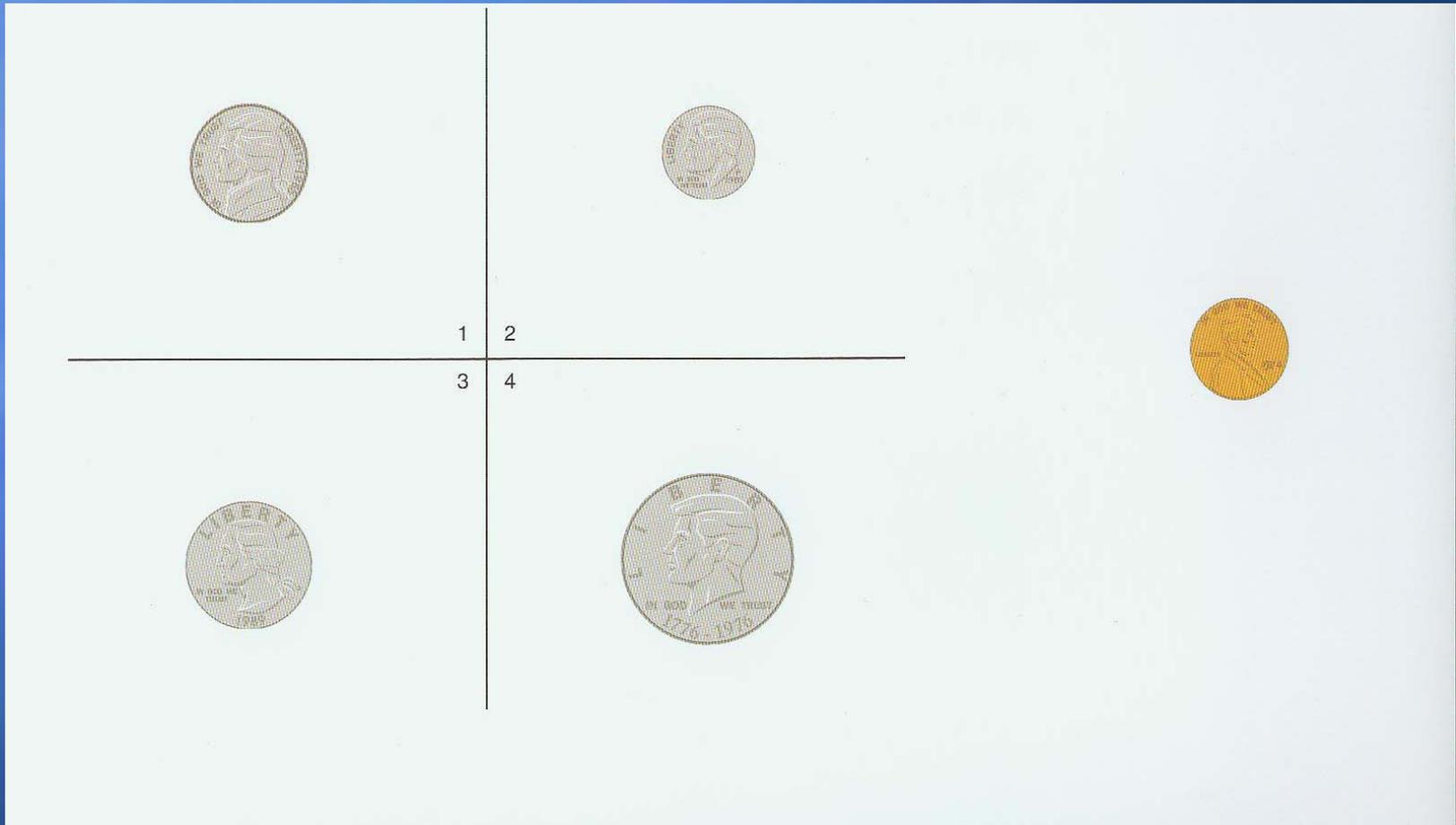
**Compared to the *Head Start
Child Outcomes
Framework*, the NRS covers
only 15 of 46 language,
literacy, and mathematics
indicators —**

33% of the total.

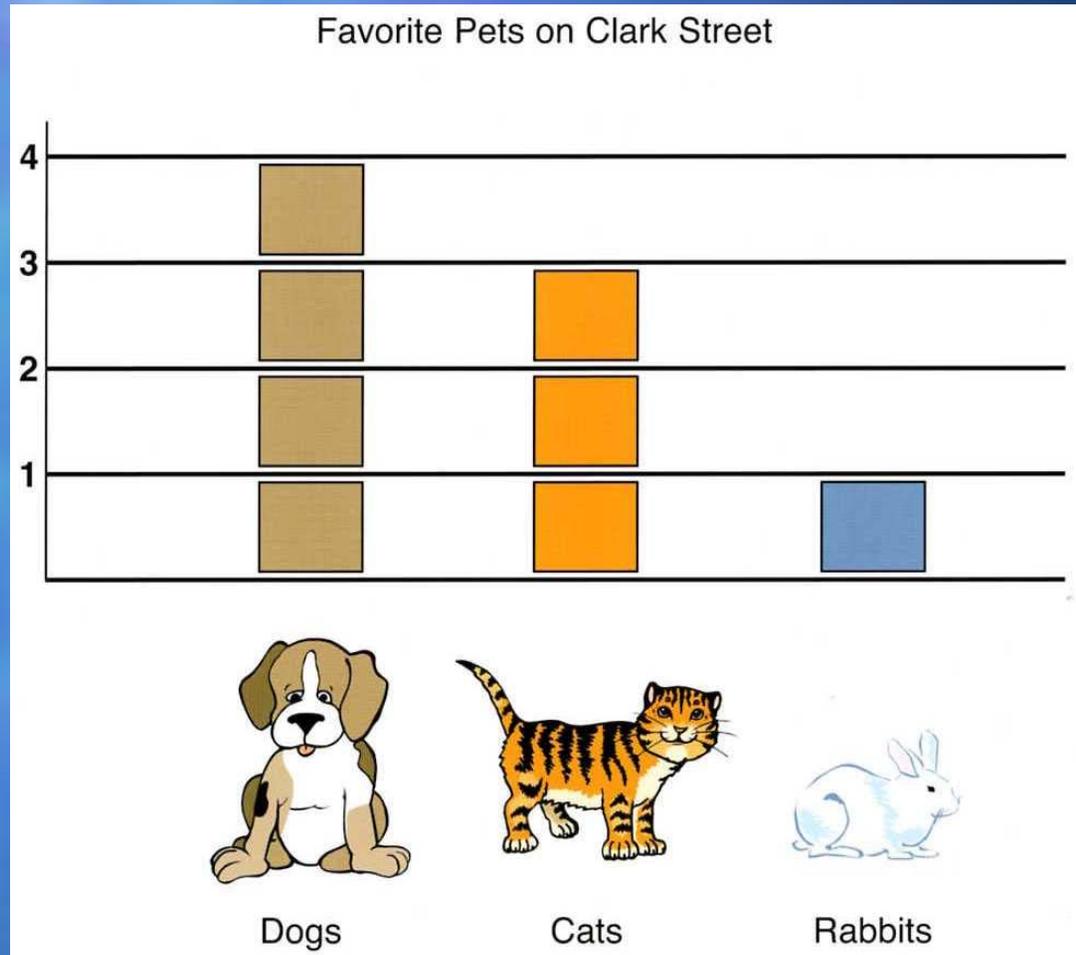
Construct-Irrelevant Variance

The extent to which test scores are influenced by factors that are irrelevant to the constructs the test is intended to measure.

(AERA/APA/NCME, 1999)



“Which one of these coins is smaller in size than the penny?”



“This graph shows how many children on Clark Street have each kind of pet: Dogs, cats, or rabbits. Which kind do the most children have? Which kind of pet is most popular?”

Other Problems With The NRS

- **Weak validity data**
- **Measurement-Driven Instruction**
- **Test Administration**
- **Inadequate Spanish version and minimal adaptation for children with special needs**

United States Government Accountability Office
Report to Congressional Requesters

GAO

May 2005

HEAD START

Further Development
Could Allow Results
of New Test to Be
Used for Decision
Making



GAO
Accountability • Integrity • Reliability

GAO-05-343

GAO Report (May 2005)

What the GAO Found

“The Head Start Bureau has not shown that the NRS ... results are valid measures of the learning that takes place [in Head Start].”

The NRS Experience

- Only 40% of the children were eager to go with the tester in the spring
- Almost half of the testers reported difficult behaviors persisting from the fall
- One-quarter of the testers said that test procedures were unnatural
- Half of the teacher-testers reported children not doing as well as expected, especially on letter-naming and vocabulary

“(6) SPECIAL RULE.—The use of assessment items and data on any assessment authorized under this subchapter by an agent or agents of the Federal Government to provide rewards or sanctions for individual children or teachers is prohibited. The Secretary shall not use the results of a single assessment as the sole or primary method for assessing program effectiveness or making grantee funding determinations at the national, regional, or local level.

***High stakes
testing does not
promote learning
in early childhood***

“I can’t for the life of me understand why anyone would think it’s a bad idea to assess whether a program is progressing in crucial academic areas.”

--Wade Horn, National Journal, 2/19/05

“The National Reporting System is a key process in establishing a practical quality assurance system for Head Start.”

Craig Ramey, Chair, NRS Technical Work Group

“What we are trying to bring to Head Start is not different from what you encounter when you buy a car.....”

Craig Ramey, Chair, NRS Technical Work Group

**“If schools were
factories, America
would have solved the
education problem a
century ago.”**

-- Malcolm Gladwell, *The New Yorker*

**The best way to
evaluate a child's
performance is to
study performance,
not something else.**

**The best way to
improve a child's
performance is to
teach the child, not
test the child.**



Answering Policymakers' Questions

"Are Children Learning?"

► *Observational Assessment*

"Are public funds being
used wisely?"

► *Program Evaluation*

Observational Assessment

Methods that enable teachers to observe, record, and evaluate children's knowledge and skills while children perform tasks that are part of their daily experience.



Accountability vs. Program Evaluation

- Assessments used for **accountability** are intended to determine how well individual children are performing.
- **Program evaluations** are designed to demonstrate how effectively a program has achieved its goals.

What We Can Learn From Program Evaluations

- **If program variations are related to child outcomes**
- **How the program interacts with various child, family, and community contexts**
- **Whether the services delivered produce anticipated outcomes**

Elements to Include in A Program Evaluation

- **Child outcomes**
- **Dynamic variables**
- **Structural variables**

What Can the NRS Teach Us About NCLB?

- 1. High-stakes tests bring out the worst in everyone.**
- 2. Tests used for high-stakes change what is taught.**
- 3. High-stakes tests are typically misleading in content and conclusions.**
- 4. High-stakes tests should not be used as proxies for teacher quality and child learning.**

**Understanding
the child within
context is key to
understanding the
child**

