

Educators debate standardized testing

By Carol R. Richards
Gannett News Service
WASHINGTON — The "growing uproar" for a new back to basics emphasis in the public schools is a "consumer movement" that educators ignore at their peril, a Columbia University teaching professor told a federal conference on testing Thursday.

"The public's demand for more and more tests is usually coupled with a demand for more basic skills," said Diane S. Ravitch, assistant professor at Columbia Teacher's College. "And educators, far from leading the movement for better education, have tried to evade the issue."

Teachers should stop fighting the idea of standardized tests and instead use them properly — to identify and respond to pupils who are not learning their basic skills, she said.

Ravitch's comments at the government-sponsored National Conference on Achievement Testing and Basic Skills set the stage for a debate between the national leaders of America's educators. Albert Shanker, president of the American Federation of Teachers and John Ryor, head of the National Education Association.

Shanker agreed with Ravitch that standardized testing can be useful, and added: "Any organization that says 'let's get rid of

these tests until we have perfect ones.' I think the general public is going to think has been a terrible failure and that it's just trying to bury the evidence."

Ryor was in precisely the opposite camp. The National Education Association, the nation's largest teacher's union, asked for a moratorium on standardized testing in 1971. Why?

"Because the tests don't do what they purport to do; they're culturally biased, and they're norm-referenced and therefore make half the children losers." (Norm-referenced tests such as college board exams, the SATs and other achievement tests are

scored differently from regular classroom tests; Test-takers are ranked against one another, so half of them are always below average.)

The disagreement on the value of standardized tests was more than a spat between the heads of two rival teacher unions. The Shanker-Ryor clash was repeated time and again by teachers, state officials, professors, and scholars at the March 1-3 conference.

The program was convened by the Department of Health Education and Welfare in response to the growing public concern about the 10-year decline in college board and other standardized test scores. The decline caused parents

to question the quality of the schooling their children get, which in turn led to calls for greater emphasis on the basic skills of reading, writing and arithmetic, which in turn led to proposals for statewide and even national tests to assure that American school students indeed are mastering the basic skills. Many states now have statewide "minimal competency" tests, and one, Florida, refuses high school diplomas to youngsters who fail.

NEA chief Ryor was angry with those speakers who accused teachers of trying to evade the issue of educational quality. Teachers always get blamed, he said: "If you

want smaller classes you're accused of goldbricking. If you develop innovative programs, you're accused of squandering school funds. If you repeat lessons yearly, you're archaic and you've gone to seed. If you run a relaxed class, you're permissive. And if you don't like standardized tests, it's only because you're afraid of being evaluated."

The AFT's Shanker, on the other hand, said that not only should students be given standardized tests, but even teachers should be

tested by school districts before they're hired. "It undermines the feeling of the public toward teachers when we say its demeaning to make a teacher take a test," said Shanker.

Shanker, whose union is affiliated with the AFL-CIO, said one reason for parents distrust of educators is that educators don't level with them. School officials don't properly explain what standardized test scores mean and they don't admit when an educational "innovation" has failed, he

said. Therefore the public misuses the test scores (assuming them to be signs of school or teacher quality when in fact the tests are not meant to measure how much of what the teacher taught the students learned) and the schools neglect to purge bad programs (having never admitted they failed).

"We should strive to improve the tests," he said, "but there's no sense in throwing them out because they're imperfect."

Democrat meetings March 14

The Santa Fe County Democratic Party will hold ward meetings Tuesday, March 14, to elect delegates to the county pre-primary convention.

The ward meetings will start at 7 p.m. Meetings places are as follows:

Legislative District 1: Ward A, Chimayo School (Precincts 1,2 and 3); Ward B, Santa Cruz High School (Precincts 11,12 and 13);

Ward C, Nambe School (Precincts 21 and 22); Ward D, Pojoaque School (Precincts 31,32 and 33); Ward E, Tesuque School (Precincts 41 and 42); Ward F, Santa Fe City Hall (Precincts 51 through 55); Ward G, Agua Fria School (Precincts 61 through 64); Ward H, Acequia Madre School (Precincts 71 through 74); and Ward I, Salomon Gonzales

residence (Precinct 81). Legislative District 2: Ward A, HarVey Junior High School (Precincts 91 through 93); Ward B, Gonzales School (Precincts 101 through 106); Ward C, Agua Fria Youth Center (Precincts 111 through 115); Ward D, Alvord School (Precincts 121 through 124); and Ward E, Salazar School (Precincts 131 through 133). Legislative District 3:

Ward A, Wood-Gormley School (Precincts 141 through 145); Ward B, Harrington School (Precincts 151 through 155); Ward C, Kaune School (Precincts 161 through 167); Ward D, DeVargas Junior High School (Precincts 171 through 177); Ward E, Cienega Community House (Precinct 181); Ward F, Cerrillos Pre-School

Building (Precincts 191 and 192) and Ward G, Stanley Homemakers' Club (Precincts 201 through 203).

The county Democratic pre-primary convention will be held March 21 at Harrington Junior High School, starting at 7:30 p.m. The county credentials committee will meet at the county courthouse March 19, starting at 7:30 p.m.

Foster home needed for boy

A foster home in Santa Fe is badly needed for a handicapped 12-year-old boy, according to Rita Seeds with the Health and Social Services Department.

The boy, Andy, has multiple congenital ab-

normalities and requires a great amount of attention from his foster parents.

Ms. Seeds said that Andy had lived since his childhood in a foster home. The woman who cared for him eventually had dif-

ficulty due to her age, Ms. Seeds said.

He lived for a while with his family in a rural New Mexico village following his stay in the Santa Fe foster home.

But the family, too, is

unable to provide the necessities for Andy, Ms. Seeds said.

"The child has been diagnosed as being mentally retarded and can function in a structured special education program which is available in Santa Fe, Ms. Seeds said.

"Andy is now without a permanent home. He is a cute, lovable youngster who is attracted to other people. He is in need of a lot of personal care, affection and a home," she said.

She said that all medical expenses for Andy would be paid by the HSSD. The parents also will receive a monthly income for caring for the child, she added.

The parents would have to see that he goes regularly to the doctor and also that he attends a special education

program.

"He was raised in a foster home practically since birth. His parents could not meet his needs when he was returned to their home, so now he needs another foster home," Ms. Seeds said.

"The parents need to devote a lot of time to the child, because he's been malnourished at his home," she said.

"He needs someone who is really going to devote their time to him. He is a very lovable child and he doesn't present any behavioural problems whatsoever," she added.

She said that he behaves well in his special education classes.

Any parents wishing to take Andy into their home should contact Ms. Seeds at 827-5422.

Bookmobile schedule listed

Monday, March 6, no schedule.

Tuesday, March 7, Pojoaque Pueblo Headstart 9:30 - 10:30 a.m.; Tesuque Pueblo Headstart 11 a.m. - noon; Tesuque Day School 1:30 - 2:30 p.m.; Young Park 3 - 3:45 p.m.; Casa Alegre 4 - 5 p.m.

Wednesday, March 8, El Castillo 11:15 - 11:45 a.m.; Pasatiempo 1:30 - 2 p.m.; Penitentiary 2:30 - 3:30

p.m.; Santa Fe County Housing Authority 4 - 5 p.m.

Thursday, March 9, San Idelfonso Day School 9:15 - 10:15 a.m.; San Idelfonso Headstart 10:30 - 11:30 a.m.; Juvenile Detention Center 1:30 - 2 p.m.; Agua Fria Village 2:30 - 3:30 p.m.; Roadrunner Trailers 4 - 5 p.m.

Friday, March 10, Nambe Pueblo Headstart 9:30 - 10:30 a.m.; Nambe Com-

munity Headstart 10:15 - 11:45 a.m.; Santa Fe Community School 1:45 - 2:45 p.m.; Carlos Rey Park 3:15 - 5 p.m.

Saturday, March 11, La Cienega Trailer Park 9:30 - 10:30 a.m.; La Cienega Community Center 11 a.m. - noon; Galisteo 1:30 - 2:30 p.m.; Canada 3 - 4 p.m.; Country Club Gardens 4:30 - 5:15 p.m.

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Other reports also show it tends to "lessen daily tension and give a more relaxed, happier outlook on life."

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