

A Joint Committee Studies External Testing Programs

*Tests should be selected
by the school
for its own purposes.*

AN annual survey conducted by the American Textbook Publishers Institute shows that the increase in the use of tests from 1955 through 1958 averaged about 10 million tests per year on a national basis, rising to a total of more than 122 million in 1958. Approximately 85 percent of these tests were used in schools and colleges.

A Joint Testing Project has now been instituted. This project is sponsored by the American Association of School Administrators, the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Association of Secondary-School Principals. The study was undertaken because reports from the field indicated a need for an evaluation of the effects of increased emphasis on national, regional and state testing programs on American education.

Charles C. Holt is Director of the Joint Committee on External Testing Programs sponsored by the National Association of Secondary-School Principals, the American Association of School Administrators, and the Council of Chief State School Officers.

The purposes of the project are:

1. To determine the number and kinds of external testing programs being carried on in the schools of the nation, and the ways in which the results are being used in the schools and other agencies
2. To determine and evaluate the basic purposes and specific objectives of the various testing programs in terms of their practical effects
3. To determine whether or not testing programs are affecting the curriculum or the instructional programs. If the tests are affecting these areas, how and in what way are they operating to achieve these effects (moving subjects down to earlier years, teaching for the test, etc.)
4. To determine the amount of pupil and school time being given to external testing programs
5. To determine school costs and pupil costs which result from participation in external testing programs
6. To analyze the release of publicity and advertising practices by testing agencies.

Members of the Joint Testing Committee have posed such leading questions on nationwide and statewide testing programs as the following:

1. As nationwide and statewide tests

for scholarship and guidance purposes are further developed, will an expanding diversity of tests be offered? If so, how can schools schedule participation in testing programs without devoting substantially greater time and effort to administering and interpreting these programs and to arranging for their financial support through candidates' fees? Further, how will the school personnel find time to do the monitoring and interpreting without taking excessive time from the instructional program?

2. What priorities for participation in new testing programs can schools determine? Will the school be able to determine priorities by itself or will community pressure force schools into participation in many kinds of testing programs? Will the community tend to appraise the effectiveness of a school by its number of national scholarship winners?

3. What can schools do about the tendency to schedule testing programs earlier in the students' careers? Is it unwise to test students as early as the 10th or 9th grade? How will this react on student performance in tests? What will be the impact on the curriculum? Will there be a tendency to place in a lower grade some subjects normally reserved for study in the last year or years of high school? What will then be offered in lieu of these subjects in the senior year?

4. How can administrators and secondary school staff members become better informed and more discriminating about test items, test scores, test administration, and test interpretation?

5. Will the trend toward a less secure type of test be accelerated in order to reduce the cost to the participant? Will the school be asked to accept more responsibility for administering these less secure tests? If they are, how will the

validity and reliability of scores be affected?

6. Will testing programs have the effect of requiring schools to program students into more academic subjects? If so, into what subjects?

7. What role will colleges play in using the results of tests sponsored by testing programs?

8. Are testing programs intended to identify mainly the academically talented student? If so, can this be done effectively without an appraisal of the effort or drive of a student—the extent to which a student applies himself? To what extent can tests be expected to reflect desirably the motivation of students?

9. Will a greater multiplicity of tests result in a more reliable and valid interpretation of the student's ability and/or performance?

It is quite possible for a school system to use tests, even standardized tests, without their influencing the educational program. If that influence is to be avoided, the schools must have clear notions regarding what kind of programs they desire, and choose tests as simply one of several possible evaluation techniques. It must always be kept in mind that tests should grow out of the subject matter taught, and not the reverse. In order to be maximally helpful, testmaking must be kept close to instruction. It is obvious that the great danger in this field lies in the preparation of tests by those not close to instruction.

Tests Affect Curriculum

The chief danger of standardized tests is that they do not grow out of a particular educational environment; they are created more or less in isolation, that

is, by individuals who have nothing to do with the instructions they test.

The extent and manner in which tests affect the school curriculum depend upon: (a) The nature of the tests, and (b) the conditions under which they are administered. It can be said that nearly all tests have *some* effect on the curriculum. They are most likely to have a profound effect if the test results are used to measure the quality of the curriculum, or the effectiveness of instruction. They will also have considerable effect if it is the purpose of the schools to demonstrate their own excellence by publishing test results.

Perhaps the greatest single consideration in this respect is whether the tests are designed to measure mastery of curriculum content, or the development of highly generalized intellectual skills and abilities. Perhaps the best example of this is provided in the experience of the Iowa high schools with two types of testing programs in which they have participated since 1929.

Throughout the 1930's the State University of Iowa conducted a statewide high school testing program which involved the administration of achievement tests in many high school subjects, such as Ninth Grade Algebra, First Year Latin, American History, General Science, and Physics. These tests were designed to measure the acquisition and mastery of subject matter. The tests were based upon an analysis of the content of the textbooks most widely used in the state; and the test authors did their best to limit the tests to questions whose answers could be found in these widely used texts. The test authors did attempt to place as much emphasis as possible upon *understanding* of the content tested, rather than upon the rote learning of it and the tests were excellent tests of their

type, but they were *content* examinations.

The effect of the tests upon the schools was accentuated by the fact that the tests were administered as a part of a statewide scholarship contest, with sharp attention being given to differences among individual schools, both in the number of scholarship winners and in the scores made on the tests by the pupils tested. The undesirable effects of this program upon Iowa high schools were clear. There was a tendency to judge teachers on the basis of scores achieved by their pupils; communities tended to judge the schools by these scores and by the number of scholarship winners. Consequently, teachers generally tended to direct instruction toward the test content and to drill upon the facts which they expected to be tested.

The fact that the tests were based upon text content tended to reduce teaching to an unimaginative sameness, and to discourage curricular experimentation. The simple fact was, the teachers became extremely subject matter conscious and lost sight of the interest or needs of individual pupils.

In 1942 the original testing program was dropped in favor of a new approach. The new fall testing programs for Iowa high schools were concerned not with subject matter content, but with more general intellectual skills and abilities, such as reading comprehension, critical reasoning, problem solving skills. The individual tests no longer corresponded to separate subjects in the school curriculum. The tests were administered at the beginning of the school year, rather than at the end. This emphasized the fact that the purpose of the test was to help the teachers become better acquainted with the abilities and educational potential-

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Should the curriculum and instructional practices of teachers assist youngsters like these to obtain experiences that will help focus their vocational concerns and assist them in making appropriate vocational decisions that are educationally relevant, and vice versa? Perhaps they should. Counselors and other educators will find that reading all or parts of this book is rewarding. One of the important outcomes of this work may be to demonstrate that the child's vocational development must be of concern to those who are responsible for the nature of the educational enterprise.

—Reviewed by R. WRAY STROWIG, Assistant Professor of Education, University of Chicago, Illinois.

External Testing Programs

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ities of the individual students, so that they might improve the job of adapting instruction to individual differences.

Teachers, as a result, no longer feel personally responsible for scores made by the pupils on any particular test, but look upon the tests as diagnostic guidance and teaching instruments, rather than as means of evaluating their own personal effectiveness.

New Jersey's Commissioner of Education, Frederick M. Raubinger, has pointed out: "Tests cannot possibly reach some of the most important outcomes of education. Intellectual curiosity, persistence, moral values, the attitude of competing with one's self instead of one's fellows—all proper objectives of good teaching—cannot be measured by tests."¹ Raubinger, and others, have pointed out that schools, in order to improve on their records in tests, are urged to push high school subject matter down to the junior high and elementary schools. There are, perhaps, cases in which this may have been successful. However, if the moving down of subject matter is simply response to testing programs, rather than good educational practice, it becomes suspect.

Another serious question arises in the amount of testing which is being done in many of our schools. Occasionally, the testing program becomes so great that it interferes with teaching, simply because it takes a disproportionate amount of time, turns teachers into proctors, and gives the impression that the real work of education is wrapped up in the taking and passing of tests. It is clear that the selection of tests should be made by each school in terms of its own purposes.

¹Frederick M. Raubinger. "A Nationwide Testing Program." *NEA Journal*, November 1959. p. 29.

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