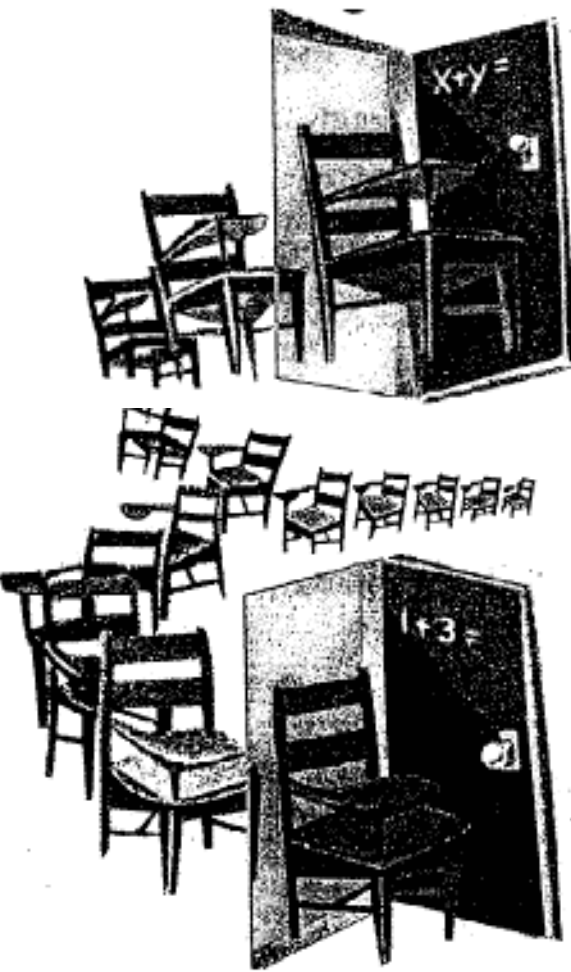


Editorial:

## IT'S OFFICIAL: STATE LEGISLATIVE ANALYST AGREES STANFORD 9 TEST NOT SECURE

# Bungled Reforms

by Alan Bonsteel  
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**O**N Aug 15, the California Department of Education released the results of the STAR test of K-12 academic achievement. This year, the results mean just what they've meant since the test was first given: exactly nothing. The mainstay of the STAR test has always been the Stanford-9, an off-the-shelf test that is not aligned with California's official standards. Our group, California Parents for Educational Choice, has been pointing out for three years that all of the questions on the Stanford-9 are repeated every year, and that old copies of the test are readily available. This year, the state Legislative Analyst, in its annual report on the budget, echoed our criticisms:

*The current version of the Academic Performance Index is solely dependent on the Stanford-9, an assessment tool that is not aligned to the state's academic standards. ? The set of actual questions on the test does not change from year to year.... It is important to vary test questions from year to year in order to minimize possibilities for literal "teaching to the test" and outright cheating....Providing \$677 million in rewards based solely upon this test creates incentives for schools to misuse their knowledge of Stanford 9 test questions.*

So, if the STAR/Stanford-9 is meaningless, what about other tests in California? On Aug. 2, the National Assessment of Education Progress 2000 test scores in mathematics were released. This year's NAEP scores were a perfect laboratory to evaluate K-3 class size reduction ? the centerpiece of what passes for educational reform in California. In 2000, fourth- and eighth-graders were tested in mathematics on the NAEP. The California fourth-graders had been in reduced class sizes for part of first grade, and all of second and third grade. The eighth-graders, by contrast, had never seen the inside of a classroom with the smaller class sizes.

Please see **TESTS** on G2

## U TESTS

*Continued from Page G1*

The results California fourth graders who had been in the smaller classes finished second to last in the nation, ahead only of Mississippi. By contrast, our eighth-graders beat Mississippi, Arkansas, Louisiana and New Mexico.

Both fourth- and eighth-graders were 12 points behind the national average. However, only 15 percent of fourth-graders were rated "proficient" in mathematics, vs. 18 percent of eighth-graders ? meaning the kids who hadn't been in reduced size classes did slightly better. Both California fourth- and eighth-graders were farther behind the national average in 2000 than they were in 1990, when the NAEP was first given.

Among California fourth-graders who had been in the smaller class sizes, both the white/black and white/Hispanic test score gaps were greater than the national average. By contrast, for our eighth graders, the white/minority test score gap was better than the national average.

This last point is especially important, because class-size reduction has been pushed as a way of reducing the white/minority achievement gap.

What went wrong in California is that in the spring of 1997, class sizes in kindergarten through third grade were reduced almost overnight from 30 students to 20. The need for 50 percent more teachers at that level meant that hiring standards

plummeted. That was especially a problem in inner city, mostly-minority neighborhoods, which saw their best teachers leave for the suburbs.

California thus made the Faustian bargain of smaller class sizes often taught by weaker teachers, a problem that was especially devastating in minority communities.

Well, then, what about the SAT college entrance test? Hasnt that been going up?

California's SAT scores have been rising, all right, but almost all of the improvement has come from private schools. Our public school SAT scores increased by only 8 points during the last five years, roughly equal to the national increase of 6 points. By contrast, SAT scores in California's religious-affiliated schools increased 18 points during the same period, or more than twice as much, and scores in California's private non-religious schools increased 20 points, or 2 1/2 times as much.

The opinion manipulators in Sacramento are doing their best to put a positive spin on these dismal test scores. But what they show is that it's past time for fundamental reforms of our public schools that at least give parents a meaningful say in the education of the children.

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