

## Opinion:

# California's test scores are misleading

*By Alan Bonsteel, Los Angeles Daily News, 08/19/2009*

The California Department of Education announced on Tuesday that "for the seventh year in a row" test scores on the statewide STAR test had increased.

What the CDE officials didn't tell us is that most of the questions on the STAR, or California Standardized Testing and Reporting program, test are repeated almost every year and security on the test is nonexistent. Nor did they mention that most public school teachers know the actual questions on the exam or that test-taking is "monitored" by public school employees who have a financial interest in seeing the test scores go up.

Under those circumstances, is it any surprise that the CDE can tout seven years of steady improvement?

However, if we look at objective tests given by impartial, outside test-givers, we see a very different, and far grimmer, picture of academic success in California.

The standard for the nation in K-12 achievement is the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP. Each year, it is given throughout the nation to fourth- and eighth-graders in the subjects of math, science and reading, and in writing only to eighth-graders. In those seven categories, California has improved modestly in four, but actually worsened in three. And our results compared with other states are near the bottom of the barrel.

And the SAT? In 1998, California's college-bound seniors scored a total average of 1017 on reading and math. Ten years later, in 2008, college-bound seniors scored, once again, a total average of 1017.

These dismal results, especially in light of the big run-up in per-student spending over those last 10 years, are all the more appalling when we factor in California's dropout crisis. We are currently losing a third of our kids to dropping out of high school. Had all these missing low-achievers been rounded up for the test, the results would have been even more catastrophic.

Even looking closely at the STAR testing - deeply flawed though it is - illustrates the drop of academic success in California's high schools. In the first few grades, California kids don't do badly compared to the rest of the nation.

But by the end of high school, they have fallen off a cliff. The longer our children stay in California's public schools, the more apathetic and dumber they get.

The public school bureaucrats know all too well the real story of test scores in California - but that doesn't slow them down from using our tax dollars on phony claims that things are getting better.

As bad as our state's economy is now, that economic picture is dwarfed by the meltdown of our public schools. The state's economy will rebound, but an uneducated teenager is a tragedy for the next 50 years.

The time for K-12 educational reform is now.

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