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ABSTRACT

Data presented relate to the attitudes of elementary/secondary school teachers and students concerning standardized testing. Additional data provide a comparison of the attitudes of these groups with those predicted or expected of them by members of the National Council on Measurement in Education. The data are based on previous surveys, and provide an encouraging look at the reality of test interpretation in the schools. Overall, it is concluded that both students and teachers view standardized tests as one component of the ongoing instructional program--sometimes useful, sometimes not. They view test results with limited respect and healthy skepticism. A related conclusion is that measurement specialists generally do not have a good understanding of the opinions about standardized testing held by the users of such instruments. The attitudes predicted of teachers by test specialists are closer to the generalizations made by opponents of testing in the popular media than they are to reality. (GK)

STUDENT AND TEACHER ATTITUDES TOWARD STANDARDIZED TESTS -- A SUMMARY OF TWO SURVEYS

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Most of the data presented in this paper relate to the attitudes of elementary/secondary school teachers and students concerning standardized testing. Additional data provide a comparison of the attitudes of these groups with attitudes predicted or expected of them by a sample of "test experts," specifically, members of the National Council on Measurement in Education. All of these data are based on surveys conducted by Frank Stetz and me in the past two years.

The results are a distillation of data drawn from three papers (Beck & Stetz, 1980; Beck & Stetz, 1979; Stetz & Beck, 1979) presented at national meetings. The idea for these studies originated in an earlier pilot study of a similar nature (Stetz & Beck, 1978). The 1979 and 1980 papers are based on two different survey research studies, outlines of which are provided below; additional details concerning the studies are presented in the original papers.

DATA BASES

Teacher and Student Attitudes. The sample for this study was composed of all teachers participating in the Spring, 1978 standardization of the Metropolitan Achievement Tests. School systems included in the norming group were chosen to yield scores on a sample of students representative of the national school population in terms of geographic region, school system enrollment, socioeconomic status, and public vs. non-public school

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affiliation. A total of approximately 3500 classroom teachers were included in the norming sample.

The questions used in this study were part of a longer questionnaire designed for the norming program. Teachers were asked to complete the questionnaire as soon as possible after testing was completed. The student portion of the questionnaire was administered orally by the classroom teacher. Teachers recorded the number of hands raised in response to the various questions. Teacher responses were anonymous except for school system identification; completion of the questionnaire was optional.

Teachers were instructed to answer survey questions based on their attitudes toward standardized tests in general, not in terms of the Metropolitan series. It is important to note, however, that teachers knew that test results from this norming program would not be returned to them during the school year. Further, participation in the norming program was not optional at a classroom level. Thus, all teachers had just completed the administration of an experimental version of a test they had not selected or requested to use, and from which they would receive no results. Finally, approximately 75% of the teachers had participated in the fall standardization of the tests six months earlier, under a similar set of circumstances. Therefore, it is our opinion that this sample did not have a response bias favorable toward standardized tests simply as a result of their participation in the norming program. Further, if any response bias in the sample was likely, it would have been the tendency to react negatively toward tests. There is, of course, no easy way to evaluate this opinion.

Data in columns 1 and 2 of Table 1 summarize the number of teachers and students responding to the questionnaire. Approximately 95% of the teachers participating in the standardization program returned the questionnaire; student responses were received from approximately 88% of the norming sample. For purposes of data analysis, the sample was arbitrarily divided according to two variables -- grade level, and size and type of school system. Teachers were grouped by grade for Grades K-4, 5-8, and 9-12. For the system size and type variable, the three groups used were teachers in public school systems with fewer than 500 students per grade, public school systems enrolling over 500 students per grade, and all non-public schools. All subsequent analyses were made using these groups. To simplify the presentation of this paper, almost all results are presented in terms of the total sample. Results by size and type of school and by grade level groupings are provided in the original papers (Beck & Stetz, 1979; Stetz & Beck, 1979).

"Experts'" Expectations of Teacher and Student Attitudes. A random sample of 500 NCME members was selected from the NCME membership list. The teacher and student questionnaires were segmented into three groups; in the questionnaire cover sheet, NCME members were asked to respond as they thought teachers and students would either in Grades K-4, in Grades 5-8, or in Grades 9-12. Assignment of respondents to one of the grade ranges was done systematically.

Materials sent to each NCME member sampled included a cover letter, the questionnaire, and a postpaid return envelope. Approximately two weeks later, a followup letter was sent to each sample member, urging their cooperation. To control for response bias due to knowledge of the results of the study, the questionnaire was mailed well in advance of the 1979 NCME/AERA annual meetings. The deadline date was also prior to the annual meetings.

A total of 284 codable questionnaires were returned, representing a response rate of approximately 57% of the original sample. No check was possible on the representativeness of the respondents to the original sample.

RESULTS

Three sets of results will be presented: the attitudes of teachers, the attitudes or reactions of students, and the "test experts'" predictions of the attitudes of teachers and students. This section is organized to present the student reactions, followed by the teacher data; the "experts'" data are included in various portions to provide additional insight into the questions. Not all of the survey results can be presented here due to time and space considerations, so I've attempted to extract what strike me as being the most meaningful or relevant or interesting results. The original papers provide additional data.

Student Reactions. Two different sets of questions were used for the student surveys: one for Grades K-4, the other for Grades 5-12. Grades K-4 data will be presented first.

The first questions asked of Grades K-4 students concerned their feelings about standardized achievement tests just before and just after they took such a test. Responses were made using a five-choice smiling-to-frowning-face format. Table 2 summarizes the percents of students indicating each reaction. Students felt somewhat better after the test was completed than before testing. Perhaps this can be interpreted as pleasure or relief that the testing was completed or perhaps to a reduced feeling of anxiety after knowing what a "test" is about; our data do not permit a good analysis of the "why" in this instance. Regardless, it is clear that respondents,

on the whole, reacted rather positively toward testing. Collapsing the two smiling and the two frowning faces, from 56% (pre) to 72% (post) of the sample responded favorably, while 12% (pre) and 18% (post) reacted negatively.

A further question asked these students whether they would like to take another such test next year. Responses were slightly negative: 38% said yes, 48% no, 14% weren't sure or didn't know.

It is interesting to contrast the reactions of these students with the reactions predicted of them by NCME members. NCME members expected students to react negatively to the test -- approximately twice as many of the students had generally positive reactions to the test than was predicted and about half as many students as predicted responded unfavorably.

Grades 5-12 students were asked a different set of questions concerning their reactions to tests. Results are presented in Table 3, separately for students and NCME members. Twice as many students considered teacher-made tests harder than standardized tests than vice versa. In Grades 9-12, four times as many students considered teacher tests more difficult than standardized tests. Approximately three-quarters of the students considered test questions on standardized tests "generally fair," while about one-seventh of the sample disagreed. Only 7% of the sample indicated that they felt they scored poorly on the test they had taken; about 75% thought they did "OK/all right" or "well."

General reactions to standardized tests were neutral -- one quarter of the sample reacting positively, one quarter negatively, and half in between. Most students were interested in receiving their scores on the test, but less than one-half wanted to discuss the test answers with their teacher. (Somewhat

more of the Grades 5-8 students than the Grades 9-12 group -- 48% versus 31% -- expressed interest in discussing the test answers.)

Finally, more than twice as many students expressed nervousness before taking teacher-made tests than before standardized tests. High school students were more nervous prior to teacher-made tests and less anxious prior to standardized tests than were students in Grades 5-8. Comparing these data with a similar question asked of Grades K-4 pupils, almost twice as many of these younger students (56%) said they were nervous before taking a standardized tests. No comparable question concerning teacher-made tests was asked of this group.

NCME members greatly overestimated the perceived difficulty of standardized tests relative to teacher-made tests. They also overestimated students' negative perceptions of the fairness of the questions on standardized tests. The NCME sample overestimated the percent of students who would like to discuss the test answers and the number of students nervous before standardized tests. In contrast, NCME respondents predicted students feelings of how they scored on the tests and their general perceptions of such tests rather closely.

In summary, of students reactions at all grades to standardized tests generally ranged from neutral to positive. They consider such tests fair and are interested in how they perform -- most believing they score "OK" or better. They express some anxiety about such tests, but less nervousness than they do about teacher-made tests, which they find to be generally more difficult.

Teacher Reactions. Teachers were questioned about their attitudes toward the amount of standardized testing in their school system, their personal

use of the results of such instruments, their feelings about the usefulness of tests for various purposes, and their general reactions to such tests.

Table 4 summarizes teacher's responses to the question, "In general, the amount of standardized testing in your school system is . . ." Overall, 69% of the respondents answered "about right." Teachers in the two groups of public school systems responded similarly; respondents in non-public systems were even more satisfied with the amount of testing. Grade-group differences were small although high school teachers as a group were somewhat more satisfied with the testing programs than were elementary teachers. These data do not support the popularly held notion promoted by test critics that "most" teachers feel too much standardized testing takes place in schools. NCME respondents predicted that a much higher percentage of teachers would consider the amount of testing in their system excessive. Almost 60% of the NCME sample thought teachers would reply "too much," while less than 20% actually did so.

Teachers were also asked how much they "...personally use standardized achievement tests results" in their classrooms. Results are presented in Table 5. Overall, about 10% of the respondents make "considerable" use of such results and just under 50% make "some" use of test data. High school teachers made significantly less use of results than did primary and elementary teachers. On this question, the NCME sample's perceptions were fairly close to the responses of teachers on this question.

The questionnaire listed eight possible uses of standardized achievement test results. Teachers were asked to indicate whether they personally used tests for these purposes, and to indicate any other uses they made of such data. Across all respondents, an average of four uses were checked or

listed. Table 6 summarizes the percent of teachers who indicated they use standardized achievement results for the eight listed purposes. The uses checked most frequently were for "diagnosing strengths and weaknesses" (75%), "measuring 'growth'" (66%), and "individual student evaluation" (65%). The most infrequently checked use was for "reporting to students" (24%). Fewer than 200 responses were written in by teachers for this question; most free responses were "for grouping" and " to evaluate funded programs." Teachers in large public systems indicated fewer uses of test data and non-public teachers made substantially more use of test results. Again, high school teachers used tests less than did teachers in other grades. The NCME members' responses yielded a rank order of the various uses made very similar to that of the teachers, although NCME respondents generally predicted significantly fewer uses than were actually indicated by teachers.

The next question surveyed teacher opinions concerning the usefulness of standardized achievement test results for 17 various purposes listed in Table 7. A majority of teachers rated such instruments "useful" for 11 of the 17 purposes listed. For the total sample, the responses can be summarized as follows:

* Over 75% of teachers consider such tests useful for:
  - measuring educational "growth" of individual students
  - detecting system-wide general strengths and weaknesses

* Between 60% and 70% of respondents considered such tests useful for:
  - reporting to parents
  - helping to plan instruction for class groups
  - helping to plan instruction for individual students
  - measuring the educational status of individual students

* Fewer than 1/3 of the teachers considered such tests useful for:
  - reporting to newspapers (10%)
  - helping to evaluate teacher performance (21%)
  - comparing classes within a school (30%)

As the data in Table 7 indicate, NCME members tended to overestimate teachers' dispositions toward test use for "reporting" and "comparison" purposes and to underestimate teachers use for "instructional planning" functions.

Teachers' general reactions to standardized achievement tests were investigated through 11 semantic differential scales. The scales used and the resulting responses are summarized in Tables 8 and 9. Although the questionnaire used a seven-point response scale, data were collapsed into a three-point scale range for summary purposes. As Table 8 indicates, teachers rated themselves as generally calm, comfortable, and knowledgable about standardized tests, as interested in them, and supportive of them. The NCME predictions of teacher reactions were far more negative than were actually found. Table 9 results reveal that teachers find standardized achievement tests hard, but generally helpful, useful, and fair; on the average, respondents were fairly neutral on the unbiased-biased and valid-invalid continuums. Teachers generally rated standardized tests more helpful, fair, and useful, less biased, and harder than NCME members expected them to.

Across all of these items, approximately four times as many teachers expressed positive feelings toward standardized tests than was predicted by "experts." Generally less than 10% of the teachers expressed negative reactions to tests on these dimensions. Although such percentages are not negligible or unimportant, they are far smaller in most instances than the corresponding percentages

of teachers who reacted positively toward tests. Overall, it is again apparent that teachers' general reactions toward tests are neutral to positive.

Teachers were also asked their opinions of four test-related policies. Results, including the reactions predicted by NCME members, are summarized in Table 10. Almost two-thirds of the teachers favored use of competency tests for high school graduation. This compares very closely with the percent of adults in general who favor such test use (Gallup, 1978). Interestingly, high school teachers favored such test use by a greater percent than did either primary or elementary teachers (66% versus 53% and 63%, respectively). About one teacher in four favored increased use of testing for school accountability purposes. Interestingly, only about a third of the respondents favored increased use of criterion-referenced tests. Many teachers were apparently unfamiliar with this concept, as many wrote next to this question such comments as "what's that?" or "don't know this term." Almost 20% of the teachers left this question blank.

Responses of the teachers anticipated by the NCME sample differed significantly from the actual teacher data. NCME respondents expected far more teachers to favor increased training in test interpretation and increased use of criterion-referenced tests than was true, and they anticipated less favorable reaction to competency tests and use of test results for accountability.

The final set of questions asked teachers whether they personally favored various moratoria on tests. Responses are summarized in Table 11. Fewer than 20% of the teachers favored a moratorium on all standardized tests or on standardized achievement tests; roughly one-fourth favored such a policy on

intelligence tests; and about one teacher in three favored a moratorium on state-mandated achievement tests. NCME members' predictions were close to the teachers' responses concerning all tests and achievement tests, but significantly overestimated teacher opposition to the other two types of tests.

The responses summarized in Table 11 make it clear that teachers, in general, do not favor moratoria against most testing. These data seem to be directly in conflict with test moratorium resolutions of organizations such as the Council for Exceptional Children and, especially, the National Education Association. While the 20% favoring a moratorium on all tests or achievement tests is by no means a trival percentage, it is certainly not an overwhelmingly large percentage either. For comparison purposes, for example, higher percentages of teachers favored increased use of standardized tests for school accountability purposes or to help evaluate teachers' performance than favored moratoria on such instruments.

SUMMARY

"Standardized testing" in our schools has become so immersed in controversy and misunderstanding that what is needed to view the battlefield in perspective is to step away from the mudslinging and data-free generalizations currently being offered both by proponents and detractors of such tests. Tests are not now, nor have they ever been, nor will they ever be appropriately used as the criterion for performance, as the evaluation device, as the arbiter of good versus less-than-good. Tests can serve a legitimate and useful purpose when they are used along with other information as one part of such decisions. This other information can be objective or subjective,

quantitative or qualitative, "norm-referenced" or not. And the best decisions about kids, teachers, programs, or schools will be those in which as much and as many types of information as possible are brought into the process.

In this perspective, tests can often play an important, perhaps even a significant, role in decision making. But they are never appropriately used as stand-alone judges of the quality of anyone or anything. Unfortunately, this perspective -- the only one from which standardized testing can appropriately be assessed -- has been lost by the large bulk of those who discuss and write about tests from either side of the fence.

We consider our survey data, as summarized above, to provide on the whole a refreshing and encouraging look at the reality of test interpretation in our schools. Kids and teachers and, to some degree at least, administrators (Stetz & Beck, 1978) seem to us generally to have a clear and appropriate view of the role of testing. Students generally consider standardized tests to be "OK" and fair; they want to find out how they scored, but aren't really interested in taking more tests. They generally consider such tests less important and, therefore, less anxiety-provoking and less difficult than are teacher-made tests.

Teachers generally find tests to be useful... somewhat. They personally use the results... to some degree. They find the uses to which test data are put to be appropriate... generally. They don't feel there's too much testing in their schools, nor do they want to eliminate standardized tests... but they don't want to administer more such instruments. They're supportive of tests...

but mostly when used for instruction-related purposes. Teachers find tests most useful for the purposes with which they're primarily concerned -- instructional planning for individuals and groups.

Overall, we conclude that both students and teachers generally view standardized tests as one component of the ongoing instructional program -- sometimes an important component, sometimes not; sometimes useful, sometimes not. They view test results with both limited respect and healthy skepticism.

We read all of these data as indicating that the only concerned parties in this area who have maintained a clear and balanced perspective throughtout the excessive defenses of and protests concerning tests are the school staffs and the students. Other groups -- the teacher unions, test publishers, instant-expert journalists, measurement specialists, and professional organizations -- have somehow lost track of the path through this morass, but not real users of the results.

A related conclusion, based on the 1979 survey of NCME members, is that measurement specialists -- even those who are members of a theoretically practitioner-oriented organization -- generally do not have a good understanding of the opinions about standardized testing held by the users of such instruments. Going beyond the survey data presented, it is noted that the attitudes predicted of teachers by test specialists are consistently closer to the generalizations made by opponents of testing in the popular media than they are to reality. Tests specialists may be uncritically internalizing the claims being made in such articles as being the actual opinions held by teachers and students.

In summary, I would like to plea for a more thoughtful and balanced presentation of the issues in this area -- by both sides -- than we're currently witnessing. A reasoned look at this area of school testing clearly reveals the need for reduced reliance of anecdotal (especially "artificial" anecdotal) and hysterical half-truths and data-independent "evidence" supporting one's biases. I realize well what sells articles in such professional journals as Reader's Digest, Women's Day, and National Elementary Principal, in which we see the bulk of these diatribes, but such yellow journalism is unlikely to make any friends for either side. And we should all recognize by now that this is an era in which everyone associated with education needs all the friends they can get.

TABLE 1

Total Number of Teachers, Students and NCME Members Responding by Grade Group

Grades	Teachers	Students	NCME Members
K-4	1516	31,956	103
5-8	1210	28,246	95
9-12	580	11,561	86
Total	3306	71,763	284

TABLE 2

Grades K-4 Students' Opinions About an Administration of a Standardized Achievement Test

	Feelings About the Test				
					
Before the test	37%	19%	22%	9%	13%
After the test	58%	14%	10%	7%	11%

TABLE 3

Comparisons Between Students' Opinions and NCME Members' Impressions of Students' Opinions Toward Standardized Achievement Tests (Grades 5-12)

Questions	Students' Opinions	NCME Members Impressions of Students' Opinions
"Which type of test do you think is usually harder: type of test you just took or the type of test your teachers make up?"		
-Standardized Tests	30%	62%
-Teacher-made tests	59	29
-Don't know	11	9
"The test you just took is supposed to show what you already have learned and what you do not know yet. Do you think the test questions were generally fair?"		
-Yes	75	53
-No	14	35
-Don't know	11	12
"How do you feel you did on this test?"		
-Well	27	17
-OK/All Right	48	48
-Poorly	7	20
-Don't know	18	16
"In general, how do you feel about the type of test you just took?"		
-Positive	26	38
-Negative	27	31
-Neutral/Unsure	47	31
"Would you be interested in finding out your scores on the test you just took?"		
-Yes	88	76
-No	7	16
-Not Sure	5	8
"Would you like the chance to discuss with your teacher the correct answers to the test you just took?"		
-Yes	43	64
-No	44	24
-Not Sure	13	12
"How many of you get nervous just before you take a test like the one you just took?"	30	65
"How many of you get nervous just before you take the kind of test your teachers make up?"	64	58

TABLE 4

Comparisons Between Teachers' Opinions and NCME Members' Impressions of Teachers' Opinions of the Amount of Standardized Testing in the Teachers' School Systems[1]

Amount of Testing in your System:	Teachers' Opinions				NCME Members' Impressions of Teachers' Opinions			
	Gr.K-4	5-8	9-12	Total	Gr.K-4	5-8	9-12	Total
Too Great	22	18	16	19	65	55	57	59
About Right	67	72	64	69	35	43	38	39
Too Little	5	6	13	7	0	1	5	2
No Answer	6	4	7	5	0	1	0	0

[1]Numbers expressed in percents.

TABLE 5

Percent of Teachers Indicating Various Amounts of Personal Use of Standardized Achievement Test Results Compared with Percent of Teachers Predicted by NCME Members

Personal Use Of Test Results:	Teachers	NCME Members' Impressions
Considerable	9%	7%
Some	50%	57%
Little	31%	34%
None/Not Applicable	10	1

TABLE 6

Percents of Teachers Making Various Uses of Standardized Achievement Test Results in Their Classrooms and Corresponding Percents Predicted by NCME Members

Personally use Standardized Achievement Test Results For:	Teachers	NCME Members' Impressions
Individual student evaluation	65%	63%
Diagnosing strengths & weaknesses	74%	56%
Class evaluation	45%	54%
Instructional planning	52%	36%
Evaluation of teaching methods	37%	11%
Reporting to parents	42%	82%
Reporting to students	24%	50%
Measuring "growth"	66%	57%

TABLE 7

Comparisons Between NCME Members' Impressions and Teachers Who Consider Standardized Achievement Test Results Useful for Various Purposes[1] (Grades K-12)

Standardized Test Results are Useful to:	Teachers' Opinions	NCME Member Impressions of Teachers' Opinions
Report to newspapers	10	33
Report to boards of education	52	77
Report to parents	67	82
Report progress to students	56	59
Measure educational status of individuals	61	65
Measure educational "growth" of individuals	77	56
Screen special education students	56	73
Help plan instruction for individuals	63	32
Help plan instruction for class groups	65	47
Detect system-wide general strengths/weaknesses	75	81
Help evaluate teaching procedures or methods	34	15
Help evaluate instructional materials	41	23
Help evaluate teacher performance	21	5
Compare students with national peer groups	58	91
Compare classes in a school	30	36
Compare schools within a system	36	41
Compare a system with systems across the country	56	75

[1]Numbers are expressed in percents.

TABLE 8

Comparisons Between NCME Members' Impressions and Teachers' Personal Feelings Toward Standardized Achievement Tests[1] (Grades K-12)

Dimensions[2]	Teachers' Feelings	NCME Members' Impressions of Teachers' Feelings
Calm		
1-2	42	10
3-5	51	73
6-7	7	17
Anxious		
Comfortable		
1-2	38	6
3-5	55	80
6-7	7	14
Uncomfortable		
Interested		
1-2	37	16
3-5	55	76
6-7	8	8
Uninterested		
Knowledgeable		
1-2	34	9
3-5	64	78
6-7	2	13
Not Knowledgeable		
Supportive		
1-2	32	8
3-5	63	83
6-7	5	9
Antagonistic		

[1] Numbers are expressed in percents.

[2] Although the questionnaire used a seven-point scale, data were collapsed into a three-point scale range for summary purposes.

TABLE 9

Teachers' General Opinions of Standardized Achievement Tests and NCME Members' Impressions of Teacher Opinions[1]

Dimensions[2]	Teachers' Opinions	NCME Members' Impressions of Teacher Opinions
Easy		
1-2	2	0
3-5	76	86
6-7	22	14
Hard		
Helpful		
1-2	24	9
3-5	69	85
6-7	7	6
Harmful		
Unbiased		
1-2	18	7
3-5	69	83
6-7	13	11
Biased		
Useful		
1-2	26	9
3-5	64	81
6-7	10	10
Useless		
Fair		
1-2	25	9
3-5	63	86
6-7	12	5
Unfair		
Valid		
1-2	16	8
3-5	72	79
6-7	12	13
Invalid		

[1] Numbers are expressed in percents.

[2] Although the questionnaire used a seven-point scale, data were collapsed into a three-point scale range for summary purposes.

TABLE 10

Comparisons Between NCME Members' Impressions and Teachers Reactions to Various Test-Related Policies[1] (Grades K-12)

Percent of Teachers Personally Favoring:	Teachers Favoring	NCME Members' Impressions of Teachers Favoring
The use of "competency" test results to determine high school graduation	59	42
Additional Training of school personnel in test interpretation and use	61	77
Increased use of test results for school "accountability" purposes	22	12
Increased use of criterion-referenced tests	38	80

[1]Numbers expressed in percents.

TABLE 11

Comparisons Between NCME Members' Impressions and Teachers Favoring Various Moratoriums on Standardized Tests[1] (Grades K-12)

Percent of Teachers Personally Favoring a Moratorium on:	Teachers Favoring	NCME Members' Impressions of Teachers Favoring
All Standardized Tests	16	19
Standardized Intelligence Tests	26	58
Standardized Achievement Tests	19	20
State-Mandated Achievement Tests	31	62

[1]Numbers expressed in percents.

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