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# Make It a Test Worth Teaching To

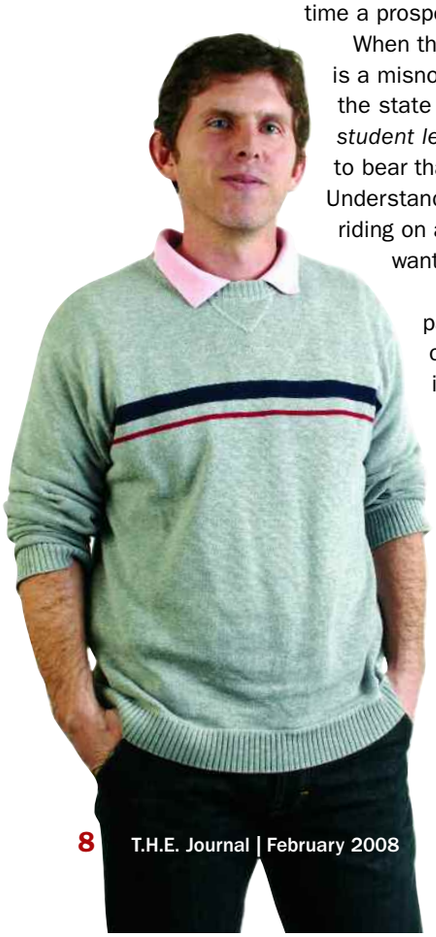
Settling the ardent debate over state assessments may start with a most elementary solution.

**THIS BEING A THURSDAY,** I'll be teaching to the test tonight, as my daughter's weekly Friday spelling quiz looms.

This would seem pretty routine to me were it not for what I know is the disdain so many educators have for the notion of teaching to the test. Teachers opposing tests? I was *so* born too soon.

Since this isn't a debate about tests, but about *a* test, I asked a teacher friend of mine what is it that teachers find so appalling about the yearly state assessment they must prepare their students for. He said it's the content of the test questions, which are not in step with daily classroom curriculum. For example, he said the word problems on the math exam leave his students stumped because the word problems in their textbooks are phrased altogether differently. So teachers must make time to drill students in old test questions, suspending regular instruction and giving birth to a scorned catchphrase. Surely someone has thought of this, but how about locking the test makers, the curriculum developers, and the textbook writers in a room until they get their stories straight?

Some of the other arguments educators make are less persuasive—such as that the tests overemphasize math and reading. Is that not like overemphasizing fruits and vegetables? The least of my worries is that my daughter becomes too good at math and reading, even if it's at the expense of physical education. It's not algebra you never use in life, it's gym. When is the last time a prospective employer asked you to climb a rope?



When the system works the way it should, teaching to the test is a misnomer. It's not the test that teachers are teaching to, but the state learning standards embedded in the test. *Has the student learned this, that, and the other?* The test is designed to bear that out, and if the results say no, ramifications ensue. Understandably, teachers don't like the idea of having so much riding on a single test performance. In other words, they don't want to be treated like their students.

Educators just aren't going to find many allies among parents by opposing standards. They may as well come out against fluoride. Count me among those who think introducing some accountability into math instruction is an idea whose time has come. I can't suffer another generation of supermarket cashiers who become disoriented when I hand over $8.07 for a $7.82 bill.

Teaching to the test has taken on such life metaphorically that I have one of those ingenuous questions one is almost afraid to ask: Haven't things always worked this way? Teachers certainly have never had any misgivings about teaching to their own tests. That's obviously because they think their tests are worth teaching to. If they can be made to feel that way about the state exams, we can go back to calling teaching to the test by its old name: school. **THE**

***—Jeff Weinstock, Executive Editor***



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