



CAPITAL IDEAS

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Time for an Alternative to Common Core Testing

BY LANCE IZUMI

When the much-criticized Common Core standards and curricula were imposed on America's schools after pressure from the Obama administration, tests aligned with Common Core came along with the package. However, now that so many parents and their children are choosing alternatives to the Common Core-infiltrated regular public schools, it is time to look for testing options that match what these students are learning.

As a refresher, Common Core is a set of national math and reading standards adopted in the early 2010s by most states.

In the wake of Common Core's adoption, a study by the Boston-based Pioneer Institute found: "Instead of accelerating the curriculum to more advanced topics and following the practices of leading international competitors, Common Core's politically-driven process resulted in the adoption of mediocre curriculum sequences used in a number of mid-performing states and promoted progressive instructional dogma shared by its developers."

The result has been lower student performance. Mengli Song of the American Institutes for Research, who studied the impact of Common Core on national reading and math scores, said, "The negative effects tend to increase over time."

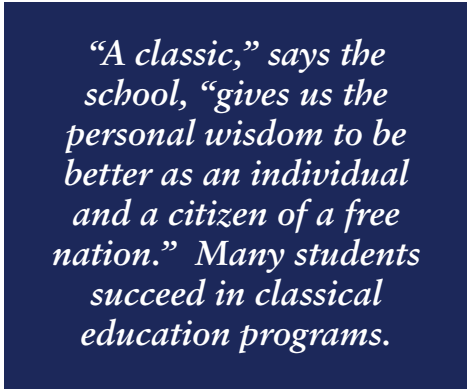
These negative effects were apparent before the COVID-19 pandemic hit, but the school disruption caused by the pandemic pushed declining test scores off a cliff.

For example, recently released results on the National Assessment for Educational Progress showed that math scores dropped by the largest amount on record. Among eighth graders, just 26 percent scored at the proficient level in 2022, way down from the already low 34 percent in 2019.

As parents saw regular public schools fail to educate their children during the pandemic, they started to look elsewhere for learning alternatives.

One option that many parents have chosen is classical education, whether through private schools, charter schools, or homeschooling.

Classical education has been defined as “a long tradition of education that has emphasized the seeking after of truth, goodness, and beauty and the study of the liberal arts [such as grammar, logic, and rhetoric] and the great books.”



“A classic,” says the school, “gives us the personal wisdom to be better as an individual and a citizen of a free nation.” Many students succeed in classical education programs.

John Adams Academy, a charter school in the Sacramento area, uses a classical education curriculum.

According to the school, students “read and study the greatest works, or ‘classics,’ of the Western Tradition” and “investigate great American works highlighting the principles of liberty, virtue, morality, entrepreneurship, and democracy.”

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Take, for instance, Demetria Zinga, an African-American homeschool mom whose oldest daughter Nyomi thrived using a classical education curriculum. Nyomi said that the curriculum was “a pretty hard challenge, really hard,” but “it helped make me a better writer,” and she graduated with honors.

During the pandemic, the number of students attending charter schools soared, as did the proportion of families deciding to homeschool their children. And many of these parents gravitated to classical education programs.

The increase in students being classically educated highlighted the problem of having a Common Core-aligned testing system. These students are not using Common

Core curricula, so state and college entrance tests aligned with Common Core do not test what these students are actually learning.

One promising option for the growing number of classically educated students is the Classic Learning Test (CLT), which is an alternative to the Common Core-aligned SAT and ACT.

According to its developers, CLT is “steeped in content that is intellectually richer and more rigorous than other standardized tests and college entrance exams.”

Further, they say: “If teaching to the test is an inescapable reality, then shouldn’t the most important test engage students with some of the most important ideas, texts, and subjects?”

The test unashamedly focuses on the Western Tradition: “Why the focus on Western culture? Because it is the tradition that has most influenced the culture and development of the United States. The CLT’s focus on this tradition presents students with ideas, topics, and issues that [they] will encounter repeatedly in college and beyond.”

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Jeremy Tate, the CEO and founder of CLT, explains: “A student coming from a classical school or home school has spent 12 years immersed in material that will never be on the SAT and ACT. The emphasis on classical and fictional texts in these environments stands in sharp contrast to the emphasis on informational texts in public schools.”

“Unlike the SAT and ACT,” he says, “the CLT is distinctly western” and presents students “with reading passages from the greatest thinkers of the western thought tradition.”

Thus, as *Inside Higher Education* notes, “Questions on the verbal reasoning section, for example, might come from an Albert Einstein speech in 1921 or from Pope John Paul II’s statement in 1984 or feature questions on Machiavelli’s *The Prince*.”

Tate says that the content of the SAT “is Common Core, which emphasizes informational texts over classical or fictional texts” and “is disconnected, rather than a reflection of what [classically educated students] learn in school.”

Colleges and universities, which have recognized the growing movement away from traditional public schools, are increasingly recognizing the CLT. According to *Forbes*, “Now more than 200 colleges accept it.”

Referring to the College Board, which owns the SAT and other standardized tests, Tate says, “We need to challenge existing companies with new companies that are grounded in the tradition that gave birth to America.”

While so much of American education is characterized by poor student achievement and progressive political indoctrination, the growing classical education movement offers hope that there is a better future for our nation’s children.

As its developers say, “CLT hopes that by offering a new standard that puts students in front of the thinkers and questions that have most meaningfully shaped our culture for the past two millennia, we can be a catalyst for renewal in education nationwide.” Let us all hope so.

Lance Izumi is senior director of the Center for Education at the Pacific Research Institute. He is the co-author of the upcoming PRI book The Great Parent Revolt: How Parents and Grassroots Leaders Are Fighting Critical Race Theory in America’s Schools.