

The Unacknowledged Lesson from the Current Testing Controversies

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[President Obama](#) wants less class time spent on testing, and some well-informed analysts are calling for an end to high-stakes testing; that testing should provide educators with data, but not directly trigger consequences. One of the two Robert Pondiscio articles that triggered this blog uses a great metaphor; “[Holding a Wolf by the Ears](#).” You want to stop, but you can’t. Indeed, that you can’t end high-stakes testing is the nature of the beast! What beast you ask? The top-down-accountability beast. Because educators are directly accountable to elected officials, and only through them to parents and schoolchildren, there has to be an objective basis for that top-down-only accountability to officials. Pondiscio wants low- and no-stakes testing; testing only to generate information educators can use to see what works. But then what basis do we have to assess merit and provide, ultimately, for accountability? And what tangible pressure is there to optimally use test-generated information. In our current system, which facilitates little, if any, bottom-up educator accountability to parents and schoolchildren, we need high stakes testing, which is an unfortunate aspect of the current U.S. school system. I want a school system in which we don’t need high stakes testing. In such a system, parental choice from a dynamic, diverse menu of schooling options is the primary basis for educator accountability for effectiveness at what they do.

In such a system, what reliable tests can and do measure would be just one of the many pieces of information that would be the basis for [bottom-up accountability](#). Because parents and their schoolchildren subjectively take account of everything that affects the value of schooling environments, TO THEM, testing would not greatly narrow the curriculum to tested items, or discourage attentiveness to important aspects of schooling environments not reflected in test scores. Then, the test results would just provide valuable information to parents and educators, alike.