

Weapons of Mass Expectations

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Words 459

A silent war is being waged on *our* soil. American students are under attack by our own government. The newly revised Elementary and Secondary Education Act, known as No Child Left Behind, has resulted in an attack of weapons of mass expectations that leaves students with disabilities behind. These young citizens are now required to participate in testing that essentially parallels the idea of holding a novice golfer to the same caliber of play as those in a PGA tournament. Could you compete with Tiger Woods? In an effort to improve the academic achievement of all students, recent policy reform blatantly discriminates.

Why should you care? Consider the following:

Woodrow Wilson, the 28th President of the United States, is regarded as one of the most intelligent and high-minded individuals who has served our country. Under his leadership, the Federal Trade Commission was established, graduated income tax was implemented, and child labor laws and the eight-hour workday came into existence. And, he was severely dyslexic.

Does your computer have an HP symbol on it? William Hewlett of Hewlett-Packard also struggled with dyslexia during his elementary years. His love of science and a strong memory helped him develop the second largest computer company in the world.

Heroes and their legacies are often defined by their contribution to society, not by standardized test scores. Had influential individuals with disabilities such as Thomas Edison, Alexander Graham Bell, and Harriett Tubman been victims of a standardized test assault, our nation's development might look quite different. High stakes testing and one-size-fits-all education ambushes students with disabilities and threatens to extinguish the talent and promise of tomorrow's heroes.

Just as the United States did not take Baghdad on the first day of war with Iraq, we should not expect students with severe learning disabilities to academically compete on standardized tests at

Mass Expectations Article -- Page 2

their grade level without first winning the incremental battles of learning basic skills. Is this not why special education programs were established?

Jay P. Heubert, of the Carnegie Scholars Program, describes the use of high stakes testing as tools that "... disproportionately punish students with disabilities..." That does not sound like an opportunity to be successful. Heubert goes on to cite evidence that "promotion testing is likely to increase, perhaps significantly, the number of students with a disability who suffer the serious consequences of dropping out." He concludes that students with disabilities are at "great risk...especially in states that administer high-stakes promotion and graduation testing."

Expecting students with severe to moderate disabilities to achieve at grade level along with their peers opposes the very essence of Public Law 94-142. Not all children learn the same nor do they develop at the same rate. From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs.