

# Nevada Public Education



## *Nevada's Assessments – Out of Whack*

*Bill Hanlon*

Out of the 45 states that originally signed on to the two K-12 testing consortiums nationwide, Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and PARCC, only about 15 remain. That should tell you something about the general confidence level in those tests.



When teachers don't get information back until the following academic year, what good is that? And just the fact that students who take these tests with pencil and paper tend to score higher than those taking the test on computers demonstrates that these tests are not "reliable" – an important factor in assessments along with Bias and Validity. Reliability is the degree in which an assessment tool produces stable and consistent results which is not occurring when paper and pencil results are matched against students taking these tests on the computer.

I'll tell you, though: If a student computes  $21 \times 32$  correctly and gets 672, if he or she doesn't write the answer as  $600 + 70 + 2$ , then his or her answer on the test is wrong. Who marks a correct answer wrong? Well, Nevada does. Silly me. All this time, I thought answers were only marked wrong when they the student could not do the problem.

Adding to testing issues at the elementary issues was the development and implementation of the secondary tests in algebra and geometry. In 2015, the state identified experts in math to help work on end-of-course exams that were to be used as a for high school graduation requirement. For those not up to date on that outcome, the Legislature dropped that particular requirement for graduation last session after initial results – and for good reason.

In a nutshell, the math experts told the Nevada Department of Education that there were huge issues with the "new" end-of-course exams as they were being developed. Initially, the state did not listen and moved forward, wasting millions of

taxpayer dollars creating, administering, and grading the tests, while also causing a great loss of regular instructional time – not to mention frustration and morale issues.

When it became clear that the state superintendent and board were not listening to the concerns of their own experts, these same experts had the where-with-all to place their concerns and recommendations in writing and send them to the governor, state superintendent, State Board of Education, local superintendents and trustees. The state superintendent's response to the concerns was to insinuate that the people involved in putting the concerns in writing were putting their licenses in jeopardy because of the "confidential" nature of these math tests.

The "confidentiality" and/or secrecy of testing in this state borders on lunacy. Teachers and their students have no clue what was or is on these end-of-course exams. Who does that? I'll tell you who does not do it: The AP, ACT, SAT, LSAT, GMAT and civil service exams. All of them release sample test questions and practice tests to help students prepare for their exams.

In addition to that transparency on the end-of-year high school exams, the state should also release what score is needed to "pass" Nevada's end-of-year exams in high school – the cut score. And that cut score should be provided in the form of a simple ratio; number correct to the total number of questions so it is easily understood in the community – not some misleading "scaled" score.

That information is important because while the Legislature deemed these tests inappropriate for graduation purposes, the superintendent and state board want students to use these SAME exams to count for 20 percent of students' grades.

My belief is simple. We should not play "gotcha" with our students. Students and their teachers should know what we expect them to know, recognize, understand, communicate and be able to do. And teachers should have an efficient and effective method to prepare for high-stakes exams that could determine if they are being promoted or eligible for graduation – not trying to guess what's on the test or how's it's scored.

The state needs to drop SBAC testing altogether because of the expense, lack of reliability, lack of equal access for students to computers, reporting shortfalls and opportunity for outside companies to collect student data— and failure to correctly know what constitutes a correct answer. The state also needs to drop these end-of-course exams until the public, including teachers and their students, have an

opportunity to discuss them in the full light of day. If the tests are good, they should stand up to public scrutiny.

The Legislature needs to look into this and assure the public that testing transparency will occur so Nevada public education can begin to restore the credibility lost by so-called educational leaders who have no background in education.

**Bill Hanlon**, is a noted speaker, an author, educator, consultant and coach for schools, former Director of the Southern Nevada Regional Professional Development Program, and is a national presenter for organizations such as AASA, ASCD, ALAS, NMSA, NASSP, NSBA, and NCTM. He was the coordinator of Clark County School District's Math/Science Institute and was also responsible for K-12 math audits. He served on the Nevada State Board of Education, Regional Director of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) and as a member of the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) States Partnership Board. He also hosted a television series, "*Algebra, you can do it!*" on PBS Las Vegas.

[Follow Bill on twitter, LinkedIn and Facebook](#)