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Since then, the AJC has cleared out its archives, so it is now only available in the form in which I originally submitted it to Maureen Downey's Get Schooled education blog.

### **Testing and the Poverty of the Accountability Movement**

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[A recent study](#) concludes that teachers who produce high test scores affect their students' lives down the road. High income and other rewards, goes the argument, follow from high test scores, and so it behooves schools to produce those scores to ensure affluent futures for their students.

You can't have test scores without tests, and in Georgia, we test, and then test again, often quite soon. Preparing for and administering multiple-choice tests pretty much dominate instructional time these days, because being graded by teachers trained in a discipline just isn't good enough evidence of students' learning. Our students take the Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills; the Iowa Test of Basic Skills; the Stanford Achievement Test; the Georgia Work Ready Test; Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests; Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests-Modified for students with disabilities because we wouldn't want them to go untested; State End-of-Course Tests; District End-of-Course tests; gateway exams at selected academic points in many counties; annual county benchmark assessments; quarterly district benchmark assessments; the System to Enhance Educational Performance (STEEP) Oral Reading Test for elementary, middle, and high school students; the Georgia High School Graduation Testing battery; the Assessing Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State (ACCESS) for English Language Learners to measure English language proficiency; Georgia Writing Assessments at three grade levels; the portfolio-based Georgia Alternate Assessment; and for the college-bound, the PSAT, SAT, ACT, and/or Advanced Placement test. My apologies to those I've overlooked. Each of these assessments comes with a high price tag that drains funds from aspects of the educational process—from hiring aides to updating infrastructures to lowering class size through the expansion of the faculty—that tend to be profoundly underfunded.

Of course, it may well be that students who produce high scores on these tests already have the advantages in place in terms of basic affluence and school affiliation and readiness that contribute both to their test-taking prowess and their affluent social futures. Such factors, however, tend to get discounted in discussions of teacher effectiveness and student achievement. [Indeed, poverty is denied by many as a factor in poor kids' low test scores.](#)

Yet in a recent talk at The University of Georgia, pioneering linguist [Stephen Krashen](#) made a compelling argument based on analyses of school performance data that he, [David Berliner](#), [Susan Ohanian](#), the late [Gerald Bracey](#), and others have analyzed. Krashen argued that the billions being spent on testing and test preparation are misspent on redundant, excessive assessments. He finds that the money could instead be put to two primary purposes in schools that are correlated with literacy improvement: providing students with better health and nutrition in the form of expanded in-school nursing services and free or reduced meals, because hungry,

malnourished, and sickly kids have trouble paying attention to their school lessons (and soon might lose the safety net that insures their health); and investing in both libraries and librarians to make books, information, and guidance available to students.

Others might spend the savings available from scaled-back testing differently. They might hire additional teachers and aides to lower the crushing class sizes that assign up to 200 students a day to many teachers, [or roughly 40 per class, which Bill Gates thinks is fine because test scores appear unrelated to class size, and test scores are the only data that matter, unless you are an English teacher and have to grade 200 essays thoughtfully.](#) They might make school buildings safer, more modern, and more conducive to learning. They might allow teachers release time to invest in their own learning about effective teaching in their disciplines, or help finance their involvement in professional activities that enhance their teaching and the school's overall quality. Or they might invest the savings in countless other ways to improve the school's climate and its work with students.

U. S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan and his billionaire advisors have a very different idea: investing even more money in even more testing. Not just a little more more testing, according to Krashen, but expanding the testing intervention by *twentyfold*. NCLB took up a modest amount of instructional time and resources in comparison to Duncan's Race To The Top. NCLB was content with testing reading and mathematics in grades 3-8. Duncan wants to test, and test again and again, pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade in all subject areas. In some states, tests are given several times each month, at immense expense to taxpayers, great intellectual cost to teachers and students, and enormous profit to well-connected edupreneurs. That's a whole lot of bubbles to fill in after deciding whether the right answer is A, B, C, or D.

So, if you think we're being over-tested now, wait till Duncan's through. Kids will know the first four letters of the alphabet pretty well. But otherwise, their education will be impoverished.