

## Annual Testing Shackles Schools and Students

To the Editor:

The No Child Left Behind Act, which mandated annual standardized testing in U.S. public schools, states that National Assessment of Educational Progress scores will be used to evaluate its effectiveness. My organization's analysis of NAEP results, however, shows that overall student achievement was rising faster before NCLB went into effect. The rate of score gains for African-Americans, English-language learners, and students with disabilities generally slowed under NCLB.

These results refute claims by defenders of the test-every-kid-every-year status quo, who [argue that NCLB's annual-exam mandate helps public schools](#).

NCLB's failure to raise scores on independent standardized exams is significant in light of widespread curriculum-narrowing resulting from the need for classroom time for test preparation. Other serious problems, such as pushing low scorers out of school and widespread cheating, are also part of NCLB's legacy.

Annual testing has flunked out based on its own standards. Congress must limit federal testing requirements to one grade each in elementary, middle, and high school, as in the pre-No Child Left Behind era. There is no justification for continuing to shackle schools with every-grade testing.

Robert A. Schaeffer  
*Public Education Director*  
*National Center for Fair & Open Testing*  
*Boston, Mass.*

## Don't Become a Teacher, Advises Award-Winner Nancie Atwell

By Jordan Moeny on March 23, 2015 3:57 PM

An influential language arts teacher who recently won a \$1 million international teaching prize has some surprising advice for young people considering joining the profession: Don't.

On March 15, Nancie Atwell, who has been teaching reading and writing for 42 years and has written several prominent books on language arts instruction, was **awarded** the first annual \$1 million Global Teacher Prize by the Varkey Foundation, based in Dubai, United Arab Emirates. The prize, which has been lauded by the likes of **Bill Gates** and Bill Clinton, who is the honorary chairman of the Varkey Foundation, aims to improve the public image of the teaching profession by highlighting the work of excellent educators.

Upon receiving the award, Atwell, who teaches at the Center for Teaching and Learning, a nonprofit demonstration school she helped found in Edgecomb, Maine, in 1990, said she was honored to represent her profession and that she felt "validated every day just by the experiences I have with children in the classroom."

But she doesn't seem keen on encouraging others to follow in her footsteps.

Following the award ceremony, Atwell **appeared on CNN's New Day** to talk about the award and the state of education. When asked what she would tell a student considering a career in teaching, she said that she would discourage them unless they could find a job in a private school.

"Public school teachers are so constrained right now by the common core standards and the tests that are developed to monitor what teachers are doing with them," she said. "If you're a creative, smart young person, I don't think this is the time to go into teaching unless an independent school would suit you."

In an interview with HuffPost Live Atwell reiterated her reservations about the Common Core State Standards, which Gates' own foundation has played a central role in supporting. "The new

common core curriculum and the tests that accompany it are tending to treat teachers as mere technicians," she said. "They open the box and they read the script, and that's not what good teaching is about. It's an intellectual enterprise, and that's been stripped from it by the current climate."

The Maine educator also agreed with HuffPost Live host Marc Lamont Hill's suggestion that the common core and the "hyper-testing, hyper-accountability climate" teachers face could be contributing to high attrition rates. She compared the demands on teachers to "straitjackets when it comes to how [teachers] interact with kids, what they ask of kids, what they bring to the classroom."

With respect to language arts in particular, Atwell said that schools' emphasis on test preparation leaves little room to emphasize the benefits of reading and writing. "It's just become a series of rig—not even rigorous, almost *ridiculous* exercises that don't have any connection with the enjoyment of stories or the exercise of self-expression," she said.

Atwell suggested that she would like to see a greater emphasis on performance assessments in schools. "We really need to be looking at what individual kids are achieving in the disciplines, authentically and personally," she said, citing her school's evaluation method, which involves students creating portfolios and reflecting on their own work, as an alternative to standardized assessment.

At the time this was posted, the Varkey Foundation and the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation had not responded to requests for comments on Atwell's statements about the state of teaching today.