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# PERSPECTIVES

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## Access Denied?

*Students with learning disabilities deserve the chance to do their best on state high school skills tests*

**W**ith disturbing frequency, employers, teachers and students across the country are discovering that getting through school is not necessarily synonymous with getting an education.

Hoping to reverse this trend at home, Oregon has spent the past several years engaged in a valiant effort to improve the quality of education it offers to its children. One of this movement's keystone achievements is the advent of the Certificate of Initial Mastery (CIM) and the Certificate of Advanced Mastery (CAM).

For those unfamiliar with the standards, the CIM is awarded based on 10th-grade level achievement in nine subjects: English, math, science, civics, history, geography, economics, arts and foreign language. Until the 2002, however, school districts are only required to offer CIMs in English and math.

Starting with the 2001-2002 school year, the CAM will be awarded to students who demonstrate 12th grade competence in English, math and career-related fields.

Without the CIM, students can eventually move on to the next grade level, but may not be able to enroll in advanced placement classes or gain admission to Oregon's public colleges and universities.

Educational reform is a worthy goal. The world is chang-

ing at such a rapid pace that it is essential to make sure that kids go into it prepared to meet the challenges of the new millennium. Indeed, the establishment of CIM and CAM has been applauded by many who see performance testing as the only way to keep track of which students are ready to move on and which ones are in danger of falling through the cracks.

But what if this new system is actually harming the students it's supposed to help?

This is exactly what some parents charged when they filed a lawsuit against the Oregon Board of Education earlier this week.

The parents allege that the CIM test in particular, which puts a strong emphasis on skills such as spelling and punctuation, put students with learning disabilities at a disadvantage, and therefore violates the Americans with Disabilities Act.

Despite the Board of Education's noble intentions, the CIM test is in danger of becoming just another obstacle to a quality education.

Under state regulations, stu-



dents are not allowed to use computers or spell-checkers on the test, even when they are used to offset learning disabilities such as dyslexia.

Why should a dyslexic student with stellar grades be penalized because his or her spelling is not up to par? If the student needs to use a computer or some other piece of equipment to fully express his or her potential, what purpose is served by denying them?

The student is no less prepared for advanced course work or a college education than anyone else. And if they fail the CIM, it would likely be because of deficiencies in the system, not themselves.

Ironically, as it stands now, the testing system could end up creating serious problems in the quest for higher education.

Even if they don't plan to attend college in Oregon, if they

aren't able to pass the CIM and CAM tests, students might

be barred from taking advanced placement classes that would enhance their chances of being accepted at other universities. This seems especially ludicrous because both the College Board, which administers the Advanced Placement program, as well as most colleges and universities will accommodate learning-disabled students.

It is in the best interest of both the students and the state for the board to re-examine the way it will allow students with special needs to be tested. Unless the tests are equally accessible to all students, they don't mean anything.

*This editorial represents the opinion of the Emerald editorial board. Responses may be sent to ode@oregon.uoregon.edu.*

### Thumbs



#### THUMBS UP

**To changing times:**  
In another attempt to establish democracy, on Feb. 27 Nigeria will hold its first election since the death of military dictator Sani Abacha. Under Abacha's rule, the results of the 1993 election were declared invalid and the president-elect was jailed.

**To whiz kids:**  
Congratulations to the high school students who dominated the University Chess Club's recent tournament. A special nod goes to Oleg Zaikov, a fifth grader who took third place.



#### THUMBS DOWN

**To quashing dissent:**  
In response to several recent lawsuits filed against gun manufacturers, a Florida lawmaker has proposed legislation that would make it illegal for local governments to file product liability suits. If the law passes, individuals can still take the gun industry to court, but government officials would be subject to up to five years in prison.

#### LETTERS POLICY

The Oregon Daily Emerald will attempt to print all letters containing comments on topics of interest to the University community. Letters must be limited to 250 words. The Emerald reserves the right to edit any letter for length, clarity, grammar, style and libel. Letters may be dropped off at EMU Suite 300.

