

SCOTT SMITH

THE EDUCATION CORNER

The myths and facts of testing

Testing has become quite controversial in education. We often hear about students' test scores or teachers reporting test results. Then in social groups, you might experience people discussing that there is too much testing imposed on our children in schools. Is there a misconception?

Depending on your generation and where you attended school, perspectives on student testing have probably changed dramatically. Testing in schools in the past was most often for determining grades in classes over material taught by the instructor. Often those tests were teacher-developed or may have come with the curriculum, covering the information taught during the instruction.

As we have moved to a more mobile society we have come to expect students to learn the same material, whether in a little country town or a large city, and no matter what geographical location, education looks different than 25 years ago. Publishers created curricula for all subjects along with creating tests to ensure that all students receive the same instruction.

Testing/assessment in education has changed over the years and we have also been able to learn more about how our brains learn and develop, thanks to science. We have learned that waiting for a student and allowing additional time for them to catch up may not be the best, and may make it even harder for the child to learn because of what we now know about brain development.

Then borrowing from the sciences and using the scientific process of gaining a baseline, applying theory, and then checking for change means education takes a different path.

In education, if the child is not showing understanding we are now able to provide specific instruction at their level and check for understanding by monitoring, which is often referred to as testing. If the child understands the concept, they are ready to move on; if not, some reteaching is necessary. Past practice often was to assume students had it because we taught it to the whole group, or they will catch up and some will, but many don't and fall behind. This is true in both math and reading.

Moving on and hoping in time they will catch up is more of a myth than reality.

Back in the 1970s, publishers were creating reading materials as fast as they could. Then they set out to show how their programs were superior to teacher-based programs. These curricula provided instructional materials along with assessments.

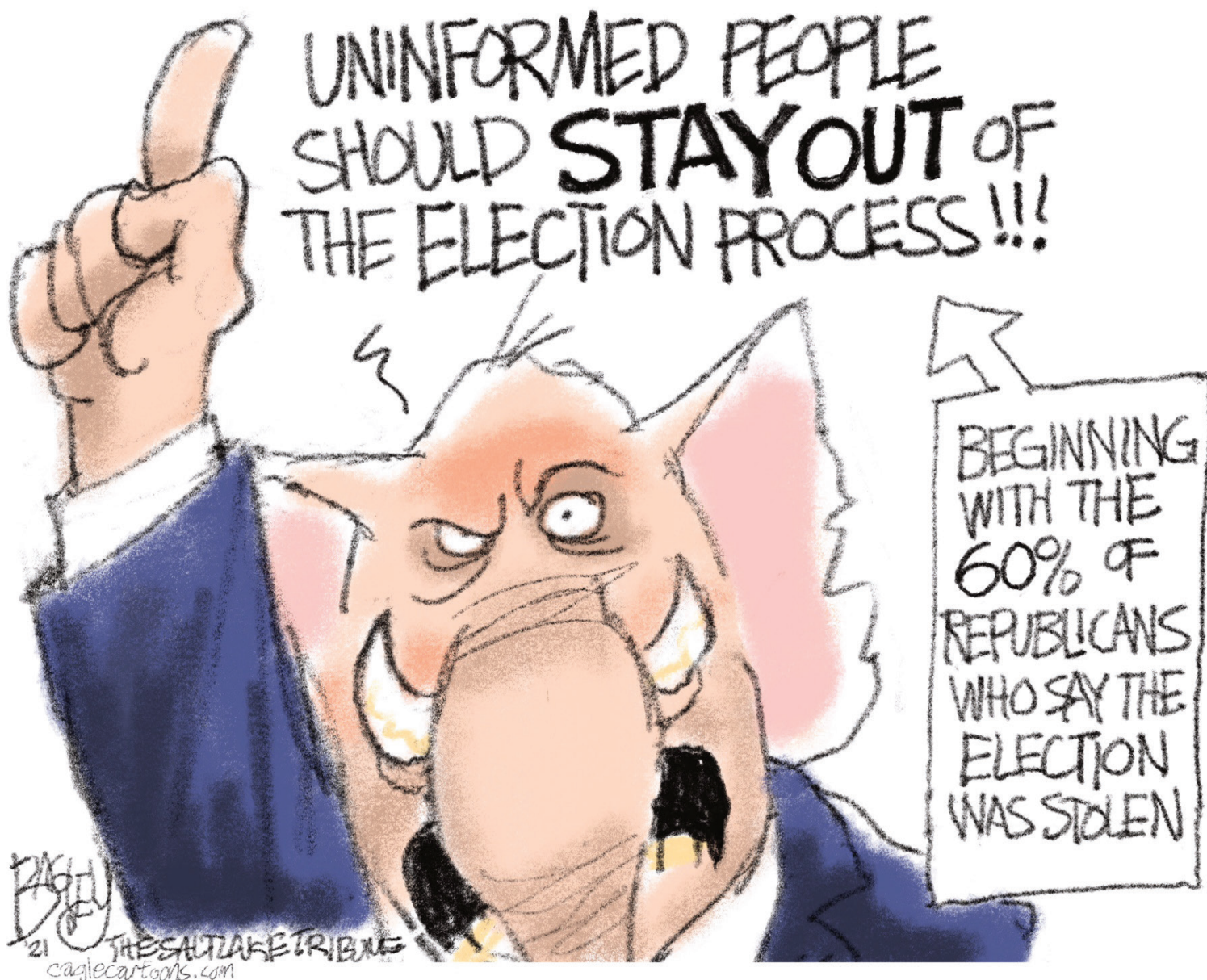
During the 1980s, studies were completed showing if teachers used and followed their programs students scored higher. They took their results to the U.S. Department of Education, getting them to sign off that teachers needed to follow the programs with fidelity.

We have all experienced changes in the medical field and the impact on our health and lives. Look at diabetes for example: Twenty years ago the way we tested sugar levels is much different than today. Schools that have embraced using data to inform education rather than teaching what a teacher feels is best have experienced greater student learning growth. There are not many people who would want the doctors to treat their cancer as they did 40 years ago. The same should be true with how we educate our youth.

Students are assessed more in today's schools than in the past. In the younger grades, the short screeners used can determine if the student knows the skill or needs additional support and are usually less than 10 minutes. As a teacher, having to screen each student can seem overwhelming and feel like all they do is test, but the students are not spending all that time testing.

The teacher can use that information to adjust their lessons to give additional instruction on skills a student might be struggling with within the curriculum. This allows the student not to fall behind and keeps their skills moving forward, whereas in the past students often fell so far behind that it was hard for them to catch up with their classmates.

Dr. Scott Smith has more than 40 years as a Umatilla County educator and serves on the Decoding Dyslexia-OR board as their parent/teacher liaison.



Poetry can lift us up in troubled times



BETTE HUSTED

FROM HERE TO ANYWHERE

It's here again — National Poetry Month. If you were taught, as poet Billy Collins joked, that you had to “tie a poem to a chair and beat a confession out of it ... to find out what it really means,” you might flinch at the very idea.

But in this pandemic year, more and more people have found themselves turning to poetry not only to help face their pain, but also to remember moments of light. Thanks to people who shared some of their own favorites this month, I found Ashland poet Angela Howe Decker's poem about waking to watch her young boys who have crept into their parents' bed “like cats or friendly spirits” and before dawn are “great wizards in small bodies, / arms outstretched above their heads, / drawing deep swells of breath and / pulling the morning toward us.”

And January Gill O'Neil's poem “In the Company of Women”: “Make me laugh over coffee, / make it a double, make it frothy / so it seethes in our delight. / ... Let the bitterness sink to the bottom of our lives. / Let us take this joy to go.”

If you're looking for poems that lift your spirits, you could try Naomi Shihab Nye's “Kindness,” Wendell Berry's “The Peace

of Wild Things,” or almost anything by Ted Kooser, who is sharing new poems on Facebook nearly every day.

Last month, I found myself sitting on the floor beside the bookcase where I'd shelved the books I brought home from my mother's bedroom. Here was Carl Sandburg's “Harvest Poems,” complete with the receipt from my hometown's Owl Rexall Drug. Forty-seven cents — the receipt dated March 21, a day that has since been designated as World Poetry Day and the same day, in 2021, that I happened to be reading.

Was it a coincidence that I could hear her quoting Sandburg, telling the wrens nesting just above our door, “People of the eaves, I wish you good morning, I wish you a thousand thanks?”

In “The Pocket Book of Verse” she had bookmarked “The Lake Isle of Innisfree,” “To a Skylark,” “Jenny Kissed Me,” and Robert Frost's “Two Look at Two.” Again, I could almost hear her voice, reading that poem to me when my teenaged life seemed too much to bear. She is still offering me guidance; the slip of paper she kept on her kitchen bulletin board and that is now on mine reminds me — in lines she copied from Frost's poem about a glass of cider — “I'd catch another bubble if I waited. / The thing was to get now and then elated.”

Poetry can help us confront hard truths, too. I think of “Facing It,” Yusef Komunyakaa's poem about visiting the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall. Or this from Joy Harjo's “A Postcolonial Tale”: “The chil-

dren were in school / learning subtraction with guns.”

Wendy Rose's poem about the Wounded Knee Massacre — inspired by the art auction of shirts and leggings and cradleboards stripped from those frozen bodies — gives voice to a mother's unspeakable grief. “Would've put her in my mouth like a snake / if I could, would've turned her into a bush / or rock if there'd been magic enough / to work such changes. Not enough magic / to stop the bullets, not enough magic / to stop the scientists, not enough magic / to stop the money.”

What poetry does at its best, I suppose, is help us address the question Mary Oliver asks in “A Summer Day”: “Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon? / Tell me, what is it you plan to do / with your one wild and precious life?”

We know this much: Poetry can be a path toward truth. “Say it plain: that many have died for this day,” Elizabeth Alexander reminded us at Barack Obama's inauguration. And we won't soon forget Amanda Gorman at the podium in January inspiring a shaken nation. “Let the globe, if nothing else, say this is true, / that even as we grieved, we grew, that even as we hurt, we hoped, that even as we tired, we tried.”

Stay strong. And happy National Poetry Month.

Bette Husted is a writer and a student of T'ai Chi and the natural world. She lives in Pendleton.

Reduce costs and provide health care for all



RICH BELZER

OTHER VIEWS

One month ago, I wrote about three areas in which the U.S. needed to catch up with the rest of the world's wealthy nations — health care, education and child care for workers. Of these, the most urgent and obvious area requiring immediate attention is health care.

Why?

Because we spend twice as much money as a percent of GDP than the other countries in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and get worse results. In addition, they all cover every citizen while, as of 2019, 28.9 million Americans were uninsured.

Our results? The U.S. ranks 40th in the world in life expectancy at birth, 78.5, while Japan ranks first at 84.3.

The U.S. ranks 37th in the world in life expectancy at age 60, 83.1, while Japan ranks first at 86.3.

The U.S. ranks 47th in the world in infant mortality — 6.5 per 1,000 live births — behind all of Western Europe and Japan. Even Russia is better at 5.8 per 1,000 live births.

I could go on, but you probably get the message at this point. This country spends extravagantly on health care as a percent of our GDP, produces poor results and does not insure everyone. In fact, according to a 2019 study by the American Journal of Public Health, 66.5% of personal bankruptcies in the U.S. are due to medical issues. Spending more and producing low-quality

results is not a winning formula. The U.S. health care system can only be described as the worst of all worlds. Can anyone look at these facts and disagree?

There are two questions we should probably be asking ourselves: How did we let it get this horrible? And, why aren't our representatives and senators falling all over themselves to fix it? If I can get the above information, we know that they can as well.

First of all, fundamental Republican ideology assumes the free market

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will always work better than the government. In many cases this is true, and is the foundation for our capitalist system. The free market works well when competition restrains prices.

For example, if Chevy priced their Silverado \$20,000 higher than a comparable Ford F-150, they would have a hard time selling their trucks. In health care, however, competition is minimal and prices are not readily available, so cost control is virtually nonexistent. Imagine that you are at home in Portland and are hit with an incredibly painful appendicitis attack. Your wife helpfully calls the EMTs but, in the meantime, might you be out on the web trying to find

the hospital with the lowest prices? Is this information even decipherable?

From a Republican perspective, our health care system is working exactly as intended in that it is creating wealth. We have the highest paid doctors in the world and our health care companies, up and down the food chain, are highly profitable. To Republicans, the fact that we spend more than other countries, produce miserable results and leave 28.9 million Americans uninsured is irrelevant compared to industry profitability.

There has been an attempt at a fix. The Affordable Care Act was passed and signed into law by former President Barack Obama in March 2010. The ACA fell significantly short of being a total solution, but it did solve the problem of those who, through a job change, could not obtain affordable insurance due to a preexisting condition. Through its additional funding of Medicaid and availability of insurance through health insurance exchanges, coverage was expanded by roughly 20 million people. Unfortunately, it did very little to address the cost of either services or pharmaceuticals.

The U.S. health care system is obviously broken; the statistics don't lie. What should voters say to any congressman or senator who isn't working toward a solution that reduces costs and provides health care for all? “You're fired.”

Rich Belzer served as director of federal marketing for a NYSE-listed computer company and was subsequently a senior executive with two NASDAQ-listed high-tech companies. He moved to Bend to join Columbia Aircraft where he became vice president of worldwide sales.