



Executive Viewpoint

Kevin S. Casey, Executive Director

A Test of Government Design

Democracy, by design, is a messy affair. The purposeful diffusion of power through a series of checks and balances and varying centers of authority slows decision-making, and provides many opportunities for many to be heard. As the old saying goes, a dictator can make the trains run on time. In our system of government however, institutional brakes on individual decision-making authority has always been valued over vesting one with the authority to make the trains run on time. Thank goodness.

As of this writing (the afternoon of January 31) Betsy DeVos is the nominee for secretary of education. Her nomination has just passed in the Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee (ironically, the “HELP” committee), clearing the way for a full Senate vote for final approval. It is most likely the full Senate vote will have occurred by the time you read this, and you will be aware of the result. The result of the votes however does not change the facts.

The facts are that Ms. DeVos has never attended a

public school, nor worked in one in any capacity. She did not send her children to public schools. She has not run a large bureaucracy like the United States Department of Education. Her answers to questions regarding IDEA, accountability, and guns in school ranged from uninformed to ludicrous. I don’t know Ms. DeVos, who may be a genuinely pleasant person, but she clearly lacks a basic understanding of fundamental educational issues. Her lack of knowledge alone makes her unqualified to assume the office to which she has been nominated.

In addition to qualifications, there is the more difficult matter of philosophy. Ms. DeVos has dedicated much time and vast sums of money to create an environment where charter schools are largely unregulated compared to public schools, and vouchers funded by public monies may be

used at religious schools and at charter schools run by for-profit entities. There are those with whom you may disagree, while at the same time recognizing the logic, experience, and intellect of the person advancing the theory with which you disagree. That is not the case when I think of Ms. DeVos’ hostility toward public schools and hostility towards rational regulation governing schools. Use of the very broad brush of “failing public schools” is intellectually dishonest, and the idea of schools being the vehicle to “advance God’s Kingdom” is likely unconstitutional.

According to the New York State Council of School Superintendents, approximately 85 percent of school children in the United States attend traditional public schools. Many of these schools will be hurt if Title I funds are redirected to fund a voucher program. If the

experience of Ms. DeVos in Michigan is any guide, many of those voters will be directed toward for-profit charter schools with an inherent conflict; is their duty of loyalty directed toward school children or to shareholders?

It’s entirely possible that by the time you read this, Ms. DeVos will have been confirmed as our secretary of education. That would not be good news in my opinion. However, if our system of government works as designed, her impact will be mitigated by competing power centers (think Senate and House opponents, courts, state government officials, unions, school boards...). It is my sincere hope Title I monies will not be redirected to create a voucher program. It is my sincere hope that the trains will not run on time. ■

The Assessment Transition from Paper to CBT 2020

Sponsor Opinion Piece by Scott B. Crowder, CEO, Educational Vistas, Inc.

The advantages of computer-based testing are numerous and the savings are substantial. They break down into three major categories: time, money, and personnel. By delivering these high-stakes assessments online and eliminating the paper production, shipping & handling, distribution, packaging, scanning, and data validation costs, you create an efficient process where administration and scoring are your only significant investments.

In 2016 over 800 schools voluntarily participated in the state-wide field testing of CBT and 60,000+ students actually took the tests on computer in ELA and math in grades 3 through 8. For the 2017 spring NYS assessment period, many schools are taking a wait-and-see approach to this new testing platform. The facts are that by 2020 the assessments will be delivered through Questar Assessment, Inc.’s Nextera secure-session program to almost

all of New York State’s 1.2+ million students in grades 3 through 8! Their process is proven and the policies, procedures, and technical requirements are all in place to assure assessment integrity, accuracy, and stability. After the testing period, authentic items are also efficiently scored in one of two ways. Either through their ScorePoint online assessment item scoring product or by vendors accessing the items through an API process and scoring



them within their own products. District still have the right to contract with any approved scoring company so long as they meet all NYSED requirements. Please scan the QR code or visit <https://cbtsupport.nysed.gov/hc/en-us/categories/201173603-Grades-3-8-ELA-and-Math-Computer-Based-Testing> to review all CBT and NYSED released resource materials, videos, and PowerPoint presentations.

So how do we adequately prepare our students for the unique challenges of computer-based testing before 2020? One way is to give students multiple opportunities to experience similar assessments, delivered in a manner consistent with the NYSED model, and containing items that also mirror NYS (or using released items from prior years). This will provide a roadmap to future student success and give teachers and proctors the necessary experience they need to facilitate

uneventful assessment administration periods. These NYS “practice” tests will provide valuable data to inform instructional decision making to overcome identified student challenges that may be addressed through the use of interventions and strategies before the next high-stakes NYS assessment administration. In a perfect world, curriculum, instruction, and dynamic assessments form a seamless web within the educational enterprise to guide students to higher achievement. ■

The statements and opinions expressed herein do not necessarily imply or reflect the opinion or philosophy of the School Administrators Association of New York State.

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