

High Stakes Testing: Is it Fair for All?

By Cheryl Miller

Federal government educational guidelines No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and IDEA require that all students are evaluated using the same state and national assessments. However, is it really a valid way of measuring the growth of special education students?

This paper gives a review of the federal guidelines, reauthorizations from 1965 to 2015 and how the changes have had an impact on American education, for states/local schools, teachers, and students. Chronologies of the changes are noted and now we are awaiting the results of another reauthorization. The federal government's change for more accountability in public education was initiated under President Lyndon Johnson's legislation with the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

This legislation was enacted on April 11, 1965. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of ESEA. ESEA's was to ensure equal and accessible education to all students. The bill's funding provided access to instructional materials, professional development for teachers, resources to support educational materials, and for parental involvement. ESEA has been reauthorized every five years since its inception.

Though there's concern regarding the impact that high stakes testing has had on all students, I have limited my view to the impact on special needs students – at my school. Under the Obama administration special needs students have been added to the changes under Race to the Top. Now their test scores are being recorded/reviewed for educational progress with their

peers. Opponents to the testing fervor are also reflected in this piece. Educators, parents and citizens are asking if we are going in the right direction for ensuring educational growth for our students. The concern regarding high stakes testing has caused students and parents to mobilize and question this political encroachment in education.

In reviewing my students' DC CAS scores from 2013-2014, we will see a picture of students who don't qualify for an alternate assessment but who don't function on grade level. It will also focus on whether this initiative accurately reflects growth for students who are tested two or more grade levels below their ability levels.

Assessments are to help schools, teachers, and local school authorities guide how to improve educational outcome and opportunities for students. Unfortunately, what we are experiencing in our fifty year quest to improve educational outcomes for students is an ever widening achievement gap.