

# NCLB portrait lacks Creativity

## Showing test-driven decline

By Emily Ortiz

In 2002, President Bush passed an act called the No Child Left Behind Act.

The act is essentially purposed to improve the performance of elementary and high school schools, by increasing the standards.

Another purpose of the act is to provide parents and students with more flexibility as to where their child could attend school.

No Child Left Behind puts a premium on standardized testing, which concentrates on memorization, common grammar, mathematical skills, and passage reading.

Northern Illinois University English Department Chair Deborah Holdstein claims that "there are rumblings to make aspects of the act more relevant to effects on college," but many of the speculations made about the impact of No Child Left Behind is that it has negative effects on higher

education from two aspects; the students and the teachers.

According to Larry Johannessen, Director of Undergraduate Studies at Northern Illinois University, because of the focus on the standardized testing material, students in the primary and secondary education levels have not done enough critical thinking, writing and analysis of literature to be successful in post-high school education.

"Students have been too influenced by the common five paragraph themed essay, which has a negative effect on them ultimately, because that theme is never used in college."

Johannessen also continues to discuss reasons on negative issues with "No Child Left Behind". Johannessen says that students are becoming less and less able to think for themselves, and that they are not able to prepare for the tasks and management skills that they need.

The Federal Government is making moves on the testing in college as well as grade schools and high schools, which in return is effecting college education and the teachers of universities.

Time teaching material on standardized testing on an hours per day basis has steadily increased over the last two years.

Along with more time spent preparing for tests, recent studies of learning habits show that girls tend to learn better in small groups rather than individually, while research for males depends upon the individual.

Johannessen states that teachers are not focused as much anymore on the educational benefit of the students but on total scores on testing.

"Teachers are much less concerned about making students better, but making the school as a whole better on paper."

## District sketches new test

By Lisbeth Wennstrom

The "No Child Left Behind" Act of 2002 has required the public schools of America to meet an "adequate yearly progress" (AYP). This measures the yearly advancement and development of a school through state testing.

Reading, math, English, and science are what each AYP is based upon and each individual school, and school district is graded in this fashion. Annual improvement is needed to ensure a satisfactory report.

Houston Independent School District (HISD) proposed to end statewide testing that is mandated by the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). In turn, HISD would replace the Texas Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (TAKS) with end-of-course (ECO) exams. This only pertains to secondary education testing.

Terri Leo, a state board member of district #6 in Houston indicated that HISD is distinct from Texas public schools.

"In Texas, local ISD's have a significant amount of autonomy and the State Board of Education does not have governance in issues," stated Leo.

According to Michael Dorsey HISD manager of Social Studies Curriculum, Instruction, and Assessment, the Texas senate passed a bill on April 19 to end TAKS testing and replace it with EOC testing. This testing would focus on the four "foundation" subjects of English/language arts, science, math, and social studies.

The ECO exams would include 12 tests. The recent proposal is that a student would have to have an overall average of 70% on the tests in order to pass.

The HISD school board has also supported the idea of this bill.

In the last "State of the Schools" address, HISD superintendent Dr. Abelardo Saavedra indicated that in 2006 the district "missed AYP" for the first time. "Missed AYP" means that the district or school did not meet requirements of certain student groups, such as Special Education or the economically disadvantaged. The reading section of the test was the most "inadequate".

"The federal ratings formula limited the number of Special Education students within a district that can take an alternative assessment. HISD exceeded the limit," explained Saavedra.

Dorsey reflected on the educational focus before No Child Left Behind.

"Before NCLB, it was possible for schools to focus on one or two groups of students to the exclusion of others without any repercussions," Dorsey commented.

Now each school must ensure that each student will achieve the requirements needed for the school to pass "AYP" or "adequate yearly progress."

"The question today is whether our focus on ensuring minimum levels of competency sometimes distracts us from an equally important task of working towards maximum lev-

els of achievement for *all* students," stated Dorsey.

HISD would like to formulate their tests to correlate with the courses that the students are taking.

"Therefore, teachers could teach students the course and not just "the test"," said Dorsey.

Many children in children attend private schools. These students, of course, are not impacted by NCLB standards and testing.

"My daughter Ellie goes to a Christian private school because I prefer the areas focused upon as opposed those that are focused on by a public school," commented Houston resident Chris Butler.

Dorsey expressed his wishes for the future of education.

"As a teacher and administrator, I want all of our students to be well prepared for a rewarding and productive life of civic engagement, continued learning, and fulfilling work," stated Dorsey.

Consequences of NCLB failure...

1st year: No Consequences  
2nd year: Warning to school issued; submit district improvement plan to local school board.

3rd year: continuation of 2nd year's consequences.

4th year: ISBE appoints district improvement panel to help district improvement plan. ISBE chooses one or more corrective actions.

5th year: ISBE notifies district that it must develop a district restructuring plan.

6th year: ISBE orders district to develop a restructuring plan

The progression of consequences for failure to meet adequate yearly progress under No Child Left Behind, provided by the Illinois State Board of Education (ISBE).

7th year: ISBE selects one option: remove school board, appoint authority to manage school, report as an unrecognized school, reassign pupils to other districts, or replace personnel.

8th year: ISBE may dissolve the school district.

## Sculpting student minds

By Victoria Leonard

The arts are often viewed inaccurately as extracurricular. This stigma has placed education in the arts behind education in subjects that can be analyzed by standardized tests.

This downplay on artistic education is increasing even though there are decades of research results that prove education in the arts is beneficial to the intellectual development of students.

According to the College Entrance Examination Board, in an analysis of SAT scores in 1995, scores for students that studied the arts earned 59 points higher on the verbal and 44 points higher on the math portion than students with out coursework in the arts.

Numerous studies have shown the correlation between the arts and higher GPAs, test scores, and achievement, including the research publication

*Eloquent Evi-*

*dence: Arts at the core of Learning.*

This publication from the President's Committee on The Arts and The Humanities outlines various studies that have shown the benefits that the arts play in education, both academically and intellectually.

Aside from testing results and statistical research, the importance of the arts can also be found through basic science.

"These types of classes [the arts] can stimulate certain parts of the right hemisphere of the brain which more logical and sequential matters do not. Fine arts also provide an additional mode of processing, which, in conjunction with typical visual and auditory information, can assist the individual in learning," said Antioch Community High School psychologist James White.

As people learn they make neural connections, storing away information. The more different connections a person has built, the more apt he or she is to recall specific information.

"Any form of learning causes neural connections, that's a given. The sources that cause the increase in neural connections certainly should vary," said ACHS Science teacher Dan Mikal.

As society continues to place immense stress on the core subjects of math, English, and science, emphasis on fine arts education is dissolving.

Some schools are experiencing decreased enroll-

ment and even elimination of classes in the art department.

A decrease in federal and state funding may be a contributing factor to the decline of arts education in public schools. (This decrease in funding is often associated with the No Child Left Behind Act.)

Perhaps the most influential factor, however, is that society has placed the measurement of educational success in the hands of standardized tests. Which consequently cannot measure art proficiency or creativity.

Focusing education only on core curriculum may even lead to a reduction in achievement in those subjects, due to a minimal amount of varied stimuli.

"Individuals should pursue a wide range of cognitive stimuli in order to build a broad base for purposeful and constructive application in life," said Mikal.

The importance of education in the arts extends too much more than test results and GPAs.

Education in the arts can provide students with experiences valuable to basic thought processes.

"The more exposure individuals have to different experiences, the better equipped they are in reasoning and problem solving obstacles in their life," said White.

Music and Art do far more than beautify, they are a source of infinite importance in the growth and education of students.

