

Testing: Standards, Testing, & Accountability

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ISACS has as a thematic focus for the school year 1999-2000 the topic of "Standards, Testing, and Accountability." For several reasons, this topic is of timely strategic importance to independent schools.

The entire conversation about pre-collegiate schooling in America has begun to center on standards-based teaching and school accountability. It is always worrisome when governors and legislatures around the country decide to reform schools, since politicians tend to want to paint with a very wide brush. How will independent schools demonstrate our responsiveness to the growing demand to teach to standards, test for standards-based learning, and demonstrate accountability for our students' growth?

While independent schools have to this point been largely reactive (nobly but ineffectively fighting mandatory state testing and boycotting rankings by publishers), we must begin to be proactive if we are to retain the independence we value so deeply: i.e., Although we define our independence in terms of governance, it is the freedom we have in hiring teachers we deem qualified (as opposed to those the state defines as "qualified"--i.e., certified) and the freedom that teachers enjoy in defining what is important to teach that makes our schools strong.

Unless we can demonstrate that we do have "standards," that we measure learning in ways comparable to state and national testing and comprehensible by the wider public and that we are willing to publish our results for accountability purposes, we will inevitably be spending our time in the future fighting rearguard actions to keep the barbarians from our gates.

For a taste at the complexity and contradictions of this issue, see the monograph, *Testing: Point & Counterpoint*

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