



Corporate Profiles

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Putting ETS to the Test

"No scores of any kind of test of subject matter knowledge are related to teacher effectiveness. There is no reason to expect that future use of teacher competency tests will have any impact whatsoever on the quality of teaching in the public school."

—Don Medley, senior research scientist at ETS.¹

The Educational Testing Service (ETS) is a private, "non-profit" American corporation. As such, it is exempt from corporate and property taxes. ETS has recently been given a contract by the Ontario government to develop the entrance to the profession test for prospective teachers.

ETS was created in 1947 by the American Council on Education, the Carnegie Corporation, the College Board, and the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching. For the fiscal year ending June 1998, ETS had real estate valued at US\$133.4 million and held \$34.8 million in cash and \$132 million in stock. It has more than 2,100 employees. In 1998, the president of ETS earned \$467,481 plus \$49,664 in deferred compensation. ETS administers the SAT, GRE, LSAT, MCAT (Medical College Aptitude Test), TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language), and PRAXIS (Professional Assessments for Beginning Teachers), as well as a number of others. The SAT is given to over five million students every year. ETS has been called the "creator of gatekeeper exams that have sorted America's educated society for more than five decades."²

The current president of ETS, Kurt Landgraf, is a former CEO of DuPont Pharmaceuticals.

Three for-profit subsidiaries have been created by ETS: the Chauncey Group International in 1996, to handle much of the employment testing business, ETS K-12 Works in 2000, and ETS Technologies, also in 2000, focusing on online learning and assessment applications. ETS also owns stock in Sylvan Learning Systems.

Following are some of the problems that have been encountered over the years with ETS, its tests, and its approach to the people taking the tests. This is by no means an exhaustive list, nor does it address many of the inherent problems with multiple choice standardized tests in general.

2001

Almost 400 colleges and universities in the U.S. have stopped using the SAT in their admissions requirements after many studies concluded that standardized tests do not add significant information to predict how students will do. In fact, the SAT explains only about 16% of the variation in freshman grades. The tests also have been shown to be biased against minorities and women.

1999

ETS agreed to cancel unusually low computer-based **Graduate Record Exam (GRE)** scores for one student, paying for her time and registration fees. The student was surprised by her low score on the computer-based GRE, so took the pencil-and-paper version. She scored significantly higher on the second test, jumping from the 3rd to the 84th percentile of test-takers. ETS had claimed that the two tests were

equivalent. The student was assisted by free legal assistance in challenging the low score from the computer-based test. ETS settled the case out of court. The GRE and other tests are no longer available in pencil-and-paper format.

1998

ETS moved to computer administration of the **Graduate Management Admissions Test (GMAT)**. Because there were too few testing sites, long waiting lists developed, as long as four months in parts of Europe and Asia. Some test takers encountered computer programming flaws while taking the test; the entire national computerized GMAT system crashed while 1,300 students were taking the test.

1995

Before phasing out the **National Teachers' Exam (NTE)**, announced at least three years earlier, thousands of New York City public school teachers received termination or demotion notices. Most of these teachers were from minority groups, many with 10 or more years of experience. They had failed the NTE. Independent studies have found that the NTE cannot predict teacher competence.

1995

ETS could not find 60 **SAT** answer sheets submitted by a high school in New York City. Although ETS offered a free make-up exam, the timing was very inappropriate. After much pressure, an alternative time was agreed to. Soon after the retest, ETS found more than two-thirds of the missing answer sheets, even though all had been in the same package. ETS unilaterally informed the students that the scores from the re-test would not be reported.

1995

In 1991, a student took the **SAT** while suffering the effects of mononucleosis. He took the exam again six months later and scored significantly better. ETS would not release his

second scores, claiming that he had cheated. After years of fighting in the courts, including appeals by ETS after losing in lower courts, the student finally won his case, but not until after he had failed to get in to the college of his choice and failed to get a swimming scholarship.

1993

A research study jointly published by the College Board and ETS concludes that males do better on multiple-choice questions than females. The gender gap narrows or disappears for essays, word problems, or other construct-response questions. ETS's tests are virtually all multiple choice format.

1992

ETS announced that they would replace the **National Teachers' Exam (NTE)** with a new test. The NTE was widely criticized as having almost 40% of the questions with either no one correct answer or more than one correct answer. Prospective teachers who failed the test subsequently passed licensing requirements. How many prospective teachers never pursued a teaching option after taking this faulty test?

1989

Seven students, out of 79 taking **Advanced Placement Exams** in California admitted to cheating. ETS invalidated the scores of all 79 students and mandated re-tests.

1989

A Federal District Court Judge issued a ruling that struck down New York's system of awarding college scholarships on the basis of the **SAT** scores.

1989

A book published on teacher competency tests, including ETS's **National Teachers' Exam (NTE)**, concluded that at least 38,000 Black,

Latino, and American Indian and other minority teacher candidates were barred from teaching by teacher competency tests.

1982

Four boys are accused of cheating on the SAT. After a year of trying to get ETS to withdraw its

accusation, the boys filed suit against ETS. In a book exposing many problems with the SAT, it is stated that ETS said privately that it "didn't really think the boys had been cheating on these tests, and that the charges would have been dropped if the boys had abandoned their protest."³

"Our plan for a made-in-Ontario teacher testing program, which I announced in May, would establish province-wide standards that would ensure all teachers are up-to-date in their skills and training."

—Education Minister Janet Ecker, July 13, 2000

"Educational Testing Service (ETS), a leading North American developer of tests for beginning teachers has been selected, through a Request for Proposals issued by the ministry earlier this year, to develop the new qualifying test."

—Ontario Ministry of Education and Training. **Background.** June 7, 2001. *Supporting teacher quality and teaching excellence.*

There is no proof that teacher testing either improves or determines the quality of teachers. However, the ideology of testing has facilitated the growth and profits of the international education industry--of which corporations such as ETS are important players. Contrary to Minister Ecker's assurances on July 13, 2000, this is **not** a made-in-Ontario program for Ontario's students, schools and teachers. Rather, it is further evidence of the Ontario government's eagerness to adopt the profit-

driven ideology of testing, in this instance to the financial benefit of the Educational Testing Service.

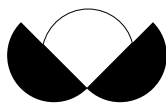
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Endnotes:

- ¹ Quoted in "Standardized Tests and Teacher Competence," by Bob Schaeffer, *School Voices*, Fall 1996, reprinted on FairTest www.fairtest.org/empl/ttcomp.htm
- ² David Hoff, "Testing ETS," *Education Week*, December 1, 1999.
- ³ David Owen with Marilyn Doerr, *None of the Above, Revised and Updated. The Truth Behind the SATs*, 1999, p.155.

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