

Kindergartners, put down your pencils

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Obama has a program called ‘ Race to the Top’ which includes The Early Learning Challenge. This is a two-year-old school-reform grant competition.

An addition to this program proposed by Andrew Cuomo, a governor from New York, is that “ All public school kindergartners sit for ‘ entry assessments’ starting in the 2014-15 school year,” says Dana Goldstein in “ Kindergartners, Put Down Your Pencils” on slate. com. Any preschools and day-care centers that agree to rate their ‘ graduating’ students based on these early learning entry exams will receive \$500 million. Most kindergartners are just learning how to read, and few even know how to write their own name. Considering students will be required to read questions to come up with their answers, the choice to test them causes controversy because of how few students can read at that age.

Any parent or student knows the distress of standardized testing. Teachers tell their students standardized tests are very important. But the students are filling out the bubbles spelling “ AC/DC” instead of actually trying. Getting a kindergartner to sit still for ten minutes? Near impossible. Trying to get them to take a multi-hour test? Not a chance. A special way of testing, the Work Sampling System, by Samuel Meisels, administers an alternate way to test the young children.

Goldstein describes it as, “ Look[ing] at the whole child across seven ‘ domains of learning’: her social development, language and literacy skills, mathematical thinking, scientific thinking, social studies awareness, interest in the arts, and physical/motor skills.” This ‘ test’ is not a written test, it’s just teachers observing their children on a variety of instances, not on a

designated test day. Nerves run high on designated test days, and the Work Sampling System takes that into account, by making it unknown to each student when they are being observed. The thought of sitting down a kindergartner and making them take a written test is cruel; observing them in their everyday life, however, is quite beneficial. The observations that the pre-school and kindergarten teachers record can help future teachers, the children, and the state.