

Assembly Joint Resolution No. 64

Adopted in Assembly August 12, 2008

Chief Clerk of the Assembly

Adopted in Senate August 27, 2008

Secretary of the Senate

This resolution was received by the Secretary of State this
____ day of _____, 2008, at _____
o'clock ____M.

Deputy Secretary of State

RESOLUTION CHAPTER _____

Assembly Joint Resolution No. 64—Relative to the public school curriculum and pupil assessment.

LEGISLATIVE COUNSEL'S DIGEST

AJR 64, Mullin. Pupil testing and secondary education.

This measure would urge the 110th Congress to recognize the importance of curriculum and instruction covering all subjects, including history/social science, science, art, music, and physical education, when Congress considers reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act. This measure also would urge school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools to focus on teaching the whole child in a wider curriculum and would urge the State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction to consider and recommend alternatives for including all subjects in the state assessment and accountability system.

WHEREAS, The statewide Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program has focused primarily on English language arts and mathematics since 1998, and tests California pupils, with few exemptions, in those two content areas in each of grades 2 to 11, inclusive; and

WHEREAS, The high school exit examination has tested only English language arts and mathematics since 2001; and

WHEREAS, California pupils take statewide tests in the content area of science only at grades 5, 8, and 10, and in the content area of history/social science only at grades 8, 10, and 11; and

WHEREAS, In California, no statewide testing exists in any other content area; and

WHEREAS, The state educational accountability system has been based since 2000 on the Academic Performance Index, which is calculated solely using state testing data; and

WHEREAS, The federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (20 U.S.C. Sec. 6301 et seq.) has required states since 2001 to test pupils, with few exemptions, only in the content areas of English

language arts and mathematics, and in the content area of science starting in 2007–08; and

WHEREAS, No federal testing is required in any other content area; and

WHEREAS, The federal educational accountability system, including designation of schools and districts for program improvement potentially resulting in sanctions and interventions, is based on adequate yearly progress, that is determined solely on the basis of participation and performance on English language arts and mathematics assessments; and

WHEREAS, The Center for Education Policy reported in 2007 that 62 percent of school districts in a nationally representative survey had increased instructional time in English language arts or mathematics since the 2001–02 implementation of the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001; that 44 percent of school districts had cut instructional time from other subjects in order to increase time in English language arts or mathematics; that the decreases amount to an average reduction of 31 percent in the total instructional time devoted to other subjects since 2001–02; and that these changes are more prevalent in low-performing school districts; and

WHEREAS, The President of the National Education Association stated in 2007 that, “Narrowing the curriculum and teaching to the test are only two of the unintended consequences of No Child Left Behind, and educators were the first to sound the alarm on this trend. The law’s single-minded focus on test preparation is robbing students of the opportunity to think critically and solve problems.”; and

WHEREAS, The National Association of School Psychologists has a stated position that recognizes that, “High stakes testing programs can also have unintended but negative effects on the education provided to all students by narrowing the curriculum and unduly emphasizing basic skills to the exclusion of the arts, technology, sciences and humanities; creating a culture of ‘teach-to-the-test’; increasing the psychological stress on children and families; and decreasing teacher job satisfaction. Further, schools may focus limited resources on efforts to directly improve test scores, rather than on strategies to improve school climate and student learning. Tests should inform instruction, not dictate what is taught.”; and

WHEREAS, The American Federation of Teachers has resolved to sponsor legislation that calls for delivery of a well-rounded education, including a full measure of social studies and the arts, necessary to the development of the whole human being and citizen, rather than narrowing delivery of instruction to meet the needs of standardized tests; and

WHEREAS, The Executive Director of the American Association of School Administrators stated in 2004 that, “we are aligning the curriculum to the tests we are giving rather than finding the tests that assess what we are teaching. This practice creates problems. The resulting education isn’t very good and parents have figured that out and don’t like it. They know that teaching to the test means we are narrowing the curriculum to fit what is being tested, narrowing instruction to fit what is being tested and narrowing minds to regurgitate only what is being taught. We are aligning our schools to a very limited vision of what learning can be.”; and

WHEREAS, The National Board on Educational Testing and Public Policy found in 2003 that 79 percent of teachers in states with accountability testing reported that instruction in the tested subject areas had increased, that more time was being devoted to the tested segments of the curriculum, and that instruction and curriculum has been further impacted by a focus on test-taking skills; and

WHEREAS, Numerous educational researchers have reported on the negative implications of curriculum narrowing, on the correlation between instruction in subjects such as the arts and high levels of achievement in reading and mathematics, and on the formation of a tiered education system in which pupils from schools of a low socioeconomic status have less access to subject areas outside of the core subjects than their higher socioeconomic status peers; and

WHEREAS, Many teachers, other education experts, and parents have pointed out that other subjects are still important to the development of young people, even though the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 does not mandate testing in subject areas other than reading and mathematics; and

WHEREAS, A 2004 study by the Council for Basic Education found ample evidence of waning commitment to the arts, foreign language, and elementary social studies. Additionally, it was found

that the greatest erosion of the curriculum is occurring in schools with high minority populations, the very populations whose access to such a curriculum has been historically most limited, and that the fact that high-minority schools are most likely to divert time and resources from liberal arts subjects, including the arts and foreign language, raises the specter of a continuing opportunity gap between white and minority pupils; and

WHEREAS, The Center for Comprehensive School Reform and Improvement found in 2006 that dramatically reducing instructional time for social studies, science, and the arts carries major costs for pupils, that those costs are unlikely to be recouped later in the educational pipeline, and that denying pupils the opportunity to build vocabulary and background knowledge curtails reading comprehension and increases the achievement gap; and

WHEREAS, The California Master Plan for Education, as reported by the Joint Committee to Develop a Master Plan for Education in 2002, states that, “While it is important to equip students with the knowledge and skills that will prepare them for success in California’s workforce and postsecondary education, it is equally important that students become well-rounded individuals with a sense of self worth and of the importance of civic and community involvement. These qualities are essential to a democratic society. They equip individuals with the ability to accept opinions that are different from their own without devaluing their own opinions. They instill a set of values that motivate a person to engage with the larger society, to try to make a positive difference and to improve the life conditions of others as well as themselves.”; and

WHEREAS, Article IX of Section 1 of California’s Constitution recognizes a commitment to a broad-based education and reads, “A general diffusion of knowledge and intelligence being essential to the preservation of the rights and liberties of the people, the Legislature shall encourage by all suitable means the promotion of intellectual, scientific, moral, and agricultural improvement.”; now, therefore, be it

Resolved by the Assembly and the Senate of the State of California, jointly, That the Legislature of the State of California urges the 110th Congress to recognize the importance of curriculum and instruction that covers all subjects, including history/social science, science, art, music, and physical education, when Congress

considers reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature of the State of California urges California school districts, county offices of education, and charter schools to focus on teaching the whole child in a wider curriculum that includes history/social science, science, art, music, and physical education, as well as English language arts mathematics; and be it further

Resolved, That the Legislature of the State of California urges the State Board of Education and the Superintendent of Public Instruction to consider and recommend alternatives for including all subjects in the assessment and accountability system of the state, including, but not limited to, the integration of core subject-matter standards and grade-level appropriate history/social science and science content into literacy and mathematics questions, without further reducing instructional time or promoting teaching to the test; and be it further

Resolved, That the Chief Clerk of the Assembly transmit copies of this resolution to the Speaker of the House of Representatives, to the Majority Leader of the Senate, to each Senator and Representative from California in the Congress of the United States, to the State Superintendent of Public Instruction, to each California county board of education, to each California school district governing board, to the State Board of Education, and to each California charter school administrator.

Attest:

Secretary of State