In his 1994 article, “Assessment-Based Reform,” Robert L. Linn, indicates assessment testing appeals to policy makers because they are inexpensive, easy to mandate, rapidly implementable, and results are visible. What to test and how to test (at each rung of the public and private education ladder); however, must be balanced with what to teach and how to teach (for the education process to produce meaningful and substantive results for the learner).

As a parent, I’ve noticed different standards for public vs private schools – at least through the junior high level. My views on assessment testing are largely the result of experiences as a life-long student, parent of a junior high student (in both bricks and mortar as well as online public and private schools), and as a peer of graduate students with many years dedicated to the teaching profession. Assessment testing is necessary. Ideally, test results reflect the student’s ability to master required content, reason, conceptualize, demonstrate critical thinking and problem solving skills.

Linn writes that some school districts and states reported that their students were scoring above the national norm (1994) when in fact they were not. Would additional safe guards protect test results from being manipulated or would this just add another layer of bureaucracy? In addition to the inflated test results from school districts, it seems clear that politicians will continue use assessment results for their own political agenda. At times it seems that what to test and how to test hinges on the changing direction of prevailing political winds.

Effective assessment testing provides the opportunity for students to demonstrate subject matter mastery. In a perfect society, assessment results are not politically exploited Linn writes “Tests are often administered not just to discover how well schools or kids are doing, but to obtain external… confirmation of the hypothesis that they are not doing well at all.” It is often the teacher is who is held accountable when the scores are not up to established standards or expected goals. “Although the use of [test] results to demonstrate shortcoming is important… [tests] are expected to be instruments of reform.” How much and when to test remains open for debate.

I do not agree that we need to change or create new testing assessments just for the sake of change. It is great to try new ideas and experiment with new approaches but not at the expense of our teachers and students. I do not support the name changing of testing assessments, especially when they have only been slightly modified or when we have elected a new American President. Education reform and the new names that come along with it means stress and work for all
evolved. I have mistaken education reform assessments when the name was changed, thinking we had an additional test assessment.

We ask a lot of our teachers as it is. With the current testing assessment, I feel we are requiring teachers to base their performance on how well their students retain information that they learned through the year. As a parent, sister, and neighbor of fellow students and teachers I would hope that with any new changes simplification will follow.

We have come so far. Handwritten assessments in public education were initiated in the 1800’s by Horace Mann in Massachusetts. Today, I support trying new techniques and technological advancements to promise the delivery of even more effective assessments.

Learning is incremental with teachers and students working toward achieving educational goals day-by-day. Imagine a small mouse running full speed on a running wheel… in a hurry, but seemingly remaining in the same spot. This may this imply failure to some watching the mouse, but to others the word perseverance comes to mind, steady persistence in a course of action in spite of difficulties, obstacles, or discouragement.

Dana