

Failure by the numbers

By [Amy Frykholm](#)

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My son has just completed his first round of the Colorado Student Assessment Program tests, Colorado's answer to No Child Left Behind. I had to laugh (not without bitterness) when I read [this recent comment](#) by President Obama: "One thing I never want to see happen is schools that are just teaching to the test." My son's school has spent agonized months in preparation for this standardized test. They are not just "teaching to the test." As far as I can tell, the test *is* the curriculum.

The school has been under enormous pressure to escape its "failing" moniker and move up in its achievement, which is judged solely by test scores. Yet, as New York University professor Diane Ravitch [pointed out](#) recently, "80 percent of our nation's public schools will be stigmatized as failing, based on NCLB's stringent and totally unrealistic expectations." This is, as Ravitch writes, "sheer madness." She goes on to explain how NCLB and Colorado's program are built on faulty data, statistical maneuvering and political gamesmanship.

Our superintendent of schools recently sent home a letter to parents noting that she knows that we are concerned about our children's "progress." I am, I guess. But I am concerned about a lot of other things as well: the atmosphere of the school and the classroom, the well-being of my son's teachers, the quality of education beyond numbers games. It is long past time for a broader conversation about education, but I see few openings for such a conversation in my own district.