

In accordance with Article II, Section 17 of the Maryland Constitution, I have today vetoed Senate Bill 281.

This bill, effective July 1, 1979, requires that, as a part of the Education Accountability Program, a national standardized test be administered to students in grades 3, 5, 7, and 9.

At the present time, the Iowa Test of Basic Skills, a nationally normed test, is required by the State Board of Education to be administered to students in grades 3, 5, and 7. After extensive deliberation and discussion, the Board decided recently to eliminate the administration of this test to 9th graders and to replace it with the Maryland Functional Reading Test. The basis of that decision is that this reading test focuses on the reading skills necessary to function as an adult and, at the 9th grade level, the testing of that skill is a more important educational concern than the identification of general student weaknesses through the administration of the Iowa Test.

The preamble to Senate Bill 281 notes the decision of the State Department of Education in this regard and states that a national standardized test is more comprehensive than a special functional exam and ought not to be discontinued for 9th graders. However, Senate Bill 281 goes further than that stated intention. It mandates that a national standardized test be given to students in grades 3, 5, 7, and 9.

It is the duty of the State Board of Education to decide upon the most appropriate and effective means of testing students at each grade level. That duty has been entrusted to the Board by the General Assembly. A national standardized test is currently administered to students in grades 3, 5, and 7. Such a test may prove, in the future, to be less effective than another type of test. Certainly such test cannot be used as the exclusive measure of evaluating educational accountability. In any event, a statutory mandate that a particular test be administered to students at certain grade levels destroys the flexibility which the State and local boards of education must have in order to most effectively evaluate the educational progress of the students entrusted to their care.

In addition, Senate Bill 281, consistent with its preamble, mandates the use of a nationally normed test for 9th graders. This test would be in addition to the Functional Reading Test currently being administered to these students. At some point, I believe that the overtesting of students becomes counterproductive. More important, sufficient time should be allowed to the Department of Education to evaluate the effectiveness of the Maryland Functional Reading Test for these 9th graders.