

but when it gets like this, where it's the whole curriculum, that's where I have problems.

Q: Did you do pretty well when you took your third- and fourth-grade TAKS?

A: Yes. That's basically what we're learning all year. But the tests made me nervous. Sometimes kids cry. I've heard of some who have thrown up. There was one girl who was crying with a rosary in her hands and one

girl who rubbed her hands so hard they bled.

Q: Are you worried that you'll be held back?

A: I know there are consequences. The tests I missed are considered failed. The placement committee will decide whether I pass.

Q: Did your mother and father have any influence on your decision to boycott?

A: Well, a kid's parents influence him in a lot of things, because you've lived with

them your whole life. But I came up with this idea myself. I knew about Martin Luther King Jr. and all those people, but I wasn't thinking about them. I was just thinking that the TAKS stuff had gone way too far, and I wanted to do something. Every American citizen has the right to protest—it's freedom of speech. My parents raised me to know that. I heard it in social studies too.

One Teacher's Balancing Act: The Fine Art of Teaching Around the Test

helen Ward has taught second grade for 17 years at Glenside Elementary School in Glenside, PA, a tidy Eisenhower-era brick building with an almost magically diverse student body that's 55% Caucasian and 42% African-American, with a handful of other minority children. Proud parents plaster their cars with bumper stickers reading "My kid has a rainbow of friends at Glenside Elementary."

The school was scrutinizing test scores by race and economic status two years before No Child Left Behind made these breakouts mandatory, and teachers and administrators bristle at both the federal law and their state's affiliated standardized test, called the Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA). While they value the data from assessments, Ward says, some worry that top-down directives to meet annual proficiency goals ignore the quirky pace at which young children grow and learn.

No Child Left Behind calls for testing to begin in third grade, so second grade is now a critical prep year in public schools. Ward's students, many of whom arrive in September having just learned to read, must by June be well on their way to making inferences about what they've read so they'll be ready to answer the essay portion of their third-grade PSSA. In math, they move in nine months from simple addition and subtraction to open-ended word problems; by April of next year, when the PSSA tests are administered, they'll need to show step-by-step solutions to questions involving multiplication and division.

Ward welcomed *Child* into her classroom near the end of the 2004–2005 school year to observe how the new emphasis on testing is subtly molding children's learning—even in the earliest primary grades, before acronyms like TAKS and PSSA have entered

their lives, and even in schools that are wary about teaching their students to the test.

WRITER'S WORKSHOP The crackly PA system in Room 5 is a comforting relic from back when today's parents were second-graders, but in writing instruction the times have changed. Instead of standing at the chalkboard drilling her 20 students on the parts of speech, Ward wanders from desk to desk helping her 7- and 8-year-olds refine short personal narratives.

Glenside's curriculum has included these writer's workshops for more than 10 years, but the jargon Ward uses as she guides her students is a new and direct nod to standardized testing. "Give me an example sentence—a detail that tells me about when your dog gets in trouble," she prompts a bright boy named Aaron, later pointing out, "You ended with a detail sentence. Remember we talked about how an ending sentence might be about a feeling?"

Ward wants to familiarize her students now with terms they'll see on the third-grade exam, where detail sentences are crucial to student essays. "We're not teaching to the test, but we are teaching test-taking skills," she says. "There are very high expectations."

READING CIRCLES Ward walks to her desk and rings a bell, saying, "Boys and girls, we need to be finishing up so we can begin working together." Soon the children are gathered in small groups reading aloud from a book called *Thunder Cake*. She joins one group and follows along in her teacher's guide, mostly ignoring the talking points that the textbook publisher suggests. At one point, where she's supposed to be introducing the literary device onomatopoeia—a concept the PSSA will test—she instead offers words of comfort, pointing out that like a fearful girl in the book, "We're all afraid of something."

One relieved little boy acknowledges that his basement at home gives him the creeps.

The Houghton Mifflin reading series Glenside uses is officially aligned with Pennsylvania's education standards, meaning that Ward's second-graders are again being introduced to skills they'll be tested on in the third-grade PSSA. But since most of the expectations for reading are not so different from what second-graders have always learned—her students cruise through high-frequency words like "have" and "went" and struggle with vocabulary like "crowed"—Ward says she feels liberated to teach this subject largely by intuition instead of teaching to the test. "Basically, 7-year-olds are still 7-year-olds," she says.

MATH DRILL To align their teaching with Pennsylvania's math standards, elementary schools are encouraged to introduce multiplication—long a third-grade staple—late in second grade. As Ward pulls out her flash cards, the children applaud. If they're feeling anxious about the math curriculum's new rigor, it doesn't show here.

Ward says, "Raise your hands to tell me something about multiplication," and every child's hand shoots up. When called on, the students tick off concepts that show a pretty sophisticated grasp of math theory: "If you multiply any number by 1, you get that number"; "When you do it by 2, you double the number and that's the answer"; "When you multiply by 11, the answer is double digits."

"The secret," wise Aaron says knowingly, "is that the multiplication sign means 'groups of.'"

But once the children move on to their next math task, a worksheet that anticipates some third-grade proficiency goals, their enthusiasm flags when they attempt a vexing word problem: "Monica likes 4 lettuce leaves on each sandwich. She has 18 lettuce