

January 2009

Dear Friends,

Last year we sent out a proposal for a new test to replace the out-of-print 1970 California Achievement Test, accompanied by a survey. A summary of those survey results is available by request, see below. The response was strongly in favor of a new test. We heard from nearly 50% of our current customers, and they were especially supportive.

What Do We Do Now?

Keeping in mind that the total responses represented only about 25-30% of the surveys we sent out, we still feel that we have gotten a clear signal to proceed with development of a new test. There is a lot of research yet to be done, but at this point the outline presented last year, "Proposed Steps to a New Test", stands with a few modifications. There is much documentation required going forward, and we are taking steps to make it available to anyone who is interested. Because of postage expenses, little is included in this mailing, but there are four ways to receive information, outlined below. If you fill out the enclosed free subscription form, survey results and other information will automatically be sent to you as it is released.

How to Receive Information and Documentation for the New Test

1. Fax on demand. By the time you receive this, you should be able to call our toll free number and have order forms and test documents automatically sent to a fax number you designate. Follow the prompts to select the extension for the document you want, press #, enter your ten-digit fax number, and press # again.
2. Email. Send an email to info@catforms.org, requesting new test documentation. Documents will be returned to you in PDF format.
3. By mail. When you send your order, note on the order form that you would like to have new test documentation sent with your order. You can also request documents by phone, if other options are impractical.
4. Online. If you have Internet access, you can read and download documentation at our web site, www.catforms.org/whatsnew.html

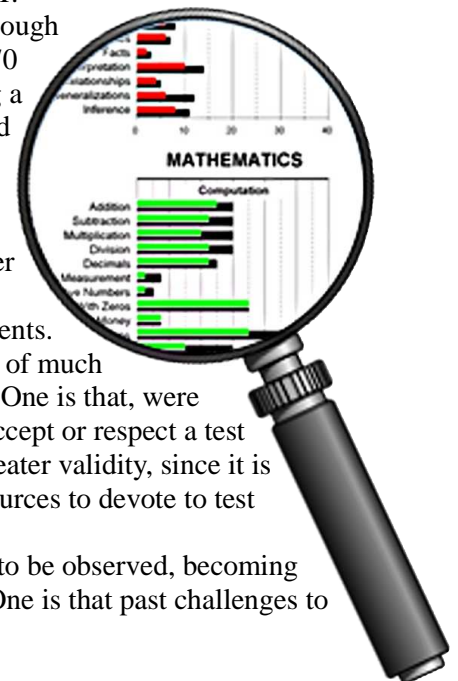
Issues Raised About the New Test

There were two issues raised about the proposed new test that we would like to address here. The first is the idea of correlation of the new test with the 1970 CAT. We did not provide an explanation as to what exactly correlation means. It does NOT mean that the new test will have the same difficulty level as the 1970 CAT.

What it does mean, is this: When the new test has been developed and used enough to establish norms from its user population, it is then equated, or *correlated*, to the 1970 CAT. If it is a well-designed, reliable test, you can then predict that a student receiving a percentile score of, say 53, in mathematics computation, would probably have received a percentile score in the range of 71-76 in mathematics computation, had he taken the 1970 CAT with its norms instead. This statement would further be qualified by the correlation coefficient between the new test and the 1970 CAT, which denotes the likelihood that a student scoring highly on one test would also score highly on the other test. Please note that testing, even with the national tests, is a science that knows its limitations and often has to deal with ranges of numbers rather than precise measurements.

The second issue that came up a number of times was whether a test would be of much use if it were not nationally normed. That is a valid concern, based on two arguments. One is that, were testing required by state or national government agencies, they would be unlikely to accept or respect a test that was not nationally normed. The other is that a nationally normed test will have greater validity, since it is produced by a company with years of experience and millions of dollars worth of resources to devote to test development.

We believe that the legal environment for Christian schools, is, if any trend is to be observed, becoming less restrictive rather than more so. I think that there are at least two reasons for this. One is that past challenges to



our schools in the courts have usually met with defeat. The other reason is the growing popularity and resultant political clout of the homeschool movement. The growth of any alternative to government-sponsored public schools can only help us legally. Only God knows the future, but I see little reason to believe that a government-mandated testing program for private schools is around the corner.

On the other hand, for the sake of our own quality of education, I believe that we do need to have a valid testing system in place to clarify our successes and to point out our failures. We dare not arrogantly assume that everything we do is superior academically to the public schools. In fact, I suspect that the reason our students consistently score so much better than most public school students may have more to do with stable home environments and our Christian culture than with the outstanding education we provide at school.

Another thing to bear in mind is that a test can establish comparisons with national populations without being nationally normed. The way this is done is by equating the test with one that has been nationally normed, as described above. In fact, there is a test in production today designed only for homeschool students that does just that. It is not widely used, but has now been officially accepted for homeschool reporting purposes in at least three states.

Comparing a Mennonite-developed test with a commercial nationally normed test would be like the proverbial apples vs oranges analogy. There would be no contest when evaluating sophistication, research, and scope of norming; a national test would be far superior. However, where a national test is often unsatisfactory for our schools is its underlying educational philosophy, its target market, cost, and accessibility. I firmly believe that a high quality test can be designed, tested, and implemented with the criteria we select, the standards we desire, and the norms we can best use. The tools are available: test-writing and item-banking software, years of research at our fingertips, and all the statistical procedures to evaluate reliability. It depends on us to use them wisely.

The proof, of course, is “in the pudding”. Or, as King Ahab, with wisdom rare for him, told Benhadad of Syria, “Let not him that girdeth on his harness boast himself as he that putteth it off.” We need your prayers, criticism, and advice more than ever before.

1970 Tests Still Available, With Limitations

As we stated last year, we have purchased Christian Light Education’s remaining inventory of test booklets. For those of you who have been using the 1970 CAT, and would like to continue to do so as long as you can, we have plenty of Level 3-5 booklets available for loan to our customers. There is no charge for use of these test booklets, except for shipping. However, because these booklets are out of print, there are substantial penalties for late or damaged returns. Please see our order form for more details. Unfortunately, we have very few Level 1 & 2 booklets, and we are retaining them for future reference and correlation studies. If you do not have sufficient Level 1 & 2 booklets on hand, you have several choices, none of them ideal:

1. Buy or borrow booklets from another school, if you can find one willing to relinquish them.
2. Purchase CAT 5 materials from Christian Light Education. They are considerably more expensive than the old materials and manual scoring only is available at this point. We have not committed to providing scoring services for the CAT 5 for now.
3. Test only Grades 4-12.

Proceeding From Here

Because of the situation with Level 1&2 booklets, we plan to focus on Grades 2-3 first in development of the new test, followed by Grade 1. We are still considering whether to have multiple grades per test level or to have levels matching individual grades that are designed to be administered together. Research, Step 1 in our nine-step plan, will continue to be ongoing, as well as a more fully fleshed out Test Blueprint (Step 2). The biggest project at the moment is compiling and sorting learning objectives (Step 3), based on the scope & sequence of our Mennonite publishers as well as the Core Knowledge Sequence. Look for a Learning Objective Form shortly, available as described on the first page of this letter.

We have had multiple offers of help from those interested in contributing to the work, for which we are grateful. One of our priority projects is an application for those interested in working on or reviewing the project and a set of contributor's guidelines. If you have any interest in helping, critiquing, or merely observing the process, please fill out and return a copy of the enclosed free subscription form. Those on this subscriber list will receive periodic updates, contribution opportunities, and new test documents as they are released. Don't miss out!

Sincerely,



Allen Troyer