

Spring 5-1-2008

The Gap Between the Ideal and The Reality How High Stakes Testing Causes The United States and China to Fall Short of Creating Well-Rounded Students

Adam L. Jones

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The Gap Between the Ideal and The Reality

How High Stakes Testing Causes The United States and
China to Fall Short of Creating Well-Rounded Students

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B.A. Degree in Political Science with Honors

May 2008

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Abstract

Since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in the United States in 2001, there has been ever increasing attention paid to the role of high-stakes testing in an education system. The system in the United States and its counterpart in the People's Republic of China have come under scrutiny because of their heavy reliance on high-stakes testing.

It is understandable in the United States that these tests may be necessary to ensure the existence of accountability in the educational system. Similarly, it is understandable that the People's Republic of China needs an education system to help place their millions of students into places of higher education. However, the systems used in both China and the United States are having dramatic negative effects on the quality of education their students are receiving.

This project first looks at how the policies of each country attempt to accomplish the three main goals that each country sets for their education system: good intellect, a good moral character, and good health. While these three goals are noble for any education system to strive for, the analysis conducted in this work show that the competition and emphasis surrounding high-stakes testing have severely diminished American and Chinese student's education in those areas in three ways: A narrowing of subjects being taught, diminished time for extracurricular activities, and a noticeable decline of student's mental health. These three side effects of No Child Left Behind and the Education Law of the People's Republic of China are directly contradicting the goals the education systems try to achieve.

The findings of this work are based upon extensive research regarding American and Chinese education policy and the negative effects of high-stakes testing. What sets this work apart from others on the same subject rests on the fact that other works center on the aspect of high-stakes testing as opposed to relating those effects to the goals of education, and even further, the performance of students.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	i
Introduction	1
Why Compare China and the United States?	
Chapter 1	2
The Search for the Well Rounded Student	
Chapter 2	10
The Current U.S. System – No Child Left Behind	
Chapter 3	16
The Chinese Education System and the Current Reforms	
Chapter 4	24
Shrinking Education: The Effects of Testing on the Curriculum and Teaching	
Chapter 5	32
Nothing But School: Shrinking Opportunities for Extra Curricular Activities, Citizenship, and Public Participation	
Chapter 6	39
The Effects of Competition on Student Performance	
Chapter 7	45
Conclusion: How Education Policy Results in Less Well Rounded Students	
Works Cited and Consulted	53
Written Capstone Summary	57

Acknowledgements:

I would first like to especially thank Professor Jing Lei, a newfound friend and mentor. Before this project began, Professor Lei and I had never worked together and neither of us could have imagined that we'd be working so closely on this project. I especially could have never imagined that she could have had as much of a positive impact on the last few months of my college career. I am indebted to her for her help and her advice throughout the process of creating this work.

I would also like to thank Professor Hongying Wang for her help in editing my thesis. Similar to Professor Lei, I did not know Professor Wang prior to the beginning of this semester and I am very grateful for her willingness to take on the task of being my second reader. Her knowledge of China and its education policies have helped me every step of the writing process.

Finally, my parents have been a never-ending source of inspiration and aid in every aspect of my life. My mother's career in education has played an instrumental role in my decision to study educational policy. Similarly, my father's never-ending support and encouragement to continue to follow my passion is something I will never forget. This project never would have gotten finished if it wasn't for their support and I am truly grateful for their love and encouragement.

Additionally, my friends deserve a great deal of thanks as I have ditched them on many occasions to work on this project. I'm sure every time the

word “thesis” came out of my mouth they were angered, but their support and understanding is very much appreciated.

Finally, Eric Holzwarth and the Honors Program at Syracuse University deserve thanks. I never thought I’d be able to complete a work of this magnitude and giving me the opportunity to work on this project has made a lasting impact on me and will continue to aid me in my future endeavors.

Introduction: Why Compare China and the United States?

When one looks at comparable education systems, the pairing of the Chinese and American education systems is not one that instantly comes to mind. The countries are quite different: Democracy vs. Communism, Capitalist vs. Socialist, a population of 500 million vs. one of 1.4 billion. However, the education policies of these two systems are quite comparable.

On the surface, both policies are system-based as opposed to student-based, meaning they focus on designing an overall system of education as opposed to creating policies that ensure individualized student achievement. On one hand, the education systems that have been created in both countries are strong and are ensuring that students are receiving an adequate education. On the other, a system-centered education policy has the effect of treating the system as if all students are the same, diminishing the individuality, and thus quality, of the education received by any given student.

On a deeper level, both systems have a similar idea of what constitutes a well-rounded student, including intellect, moral character, and health. Most importantly for the scope of this project, both countries employ an education system that is heavily reliant on testing to ensure the quality of education a student is receiving and that it is in line with the education goals. As will be discussed in the work that follows, the combination of a system-centered policy approach and the emphasis on high-stakes testing makes for an interesting set of positive and negative effects on the students.

The comparison between the education policies of China and the U.S. is a necessary one, as they are rapidly becoming two of the world's superpowers. The future success or failure of these two countries, both individually and cooperatively, rests on the success of their respective education systems, as education produces persons who will be active players in society. As the two systems are so similar, comparing the two will show both sides where they can improve, as well as learn from the mistakes of their counterpart. If the two countries are committed to working together in the future, learning from each other will be a necessary part of that cooperation.

Chapter 1: The Search for a Well-Rounded Student?

As with any education system throughout the world, both the American and Chinese education systems have a central idea as to what a student's level of knowledge and character should comprise of when they graduate. Both education systems strive to produce what is more commonly referred to as a "well-rounded student." This type of student is one that has a good balance of both knowledge and character traits as to allow them to best succeed in society. Each system has a different set of criteria for what constitutes a well-rounded student, but they both seem to rest on the two basic ideals of knowledge and character.

What is a well-rounded student in the United States?

In order for a democratic system, such as the United States, to function and survive, education needs to be placed as one of the essential democratic principles. Thomas Jefferson, one of the most prominent supporters of education in the 1800's, best detailed his views as to the role of education in a democracy as part of a report on the University of Virginia in 1818:

The objects of ... primary education...[are]: To give to every citizen the information he needs for the transaction of his own business; ... to express and preserve his ideas, his contracts and accounts in writing; to improve, by reading, his morals and faculties; to understand his duties to his neighbors and country, and to discharge with competence the functions confided to him by either; to know his rights... and in general, to observe with intelligence and faithfulness all the social relations under which he shall be placed. (Jefferson)

Jefferson's goals can best be broken down into three categories: Knowledge, Morals, and Civic Duties. The US has adopted these goals into its education

system and their undertones can still be distinguished in today's reformed system.

Knowledge:

With the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, the U.S. federal government reinforced its stake in the education of every child throughout the country. While not impeding on the rights of the states to create their own curriculum, as designated to them by the 10th Amendment to the U.S. Constitution, the federal government placed a heavier emphasis on knowledge, especially in the core subjects of math, science, and reading and writing. As a partial expression of the government's view on what the goals of education should entail, the No Child Left Behind Act effectively placed those three core subjects as the basic foundation of knowledge that every student graduating should possess.

In addition to the three subjects mentioned in No Child Left Behind, there has been emphasis placed on numerous other subject areas. A liberal arts education, which is used today as a core curriculum by institutions of higher education throughout the country, includes five subject areas: Humanities, Math, Science, Social Studies, and Foreign Language. These areas have generally been incorporated into state curricula. In all states there are minimum requirements, mandated by No Child Left Behind, for math, science, and English. However, in some states, there is a minimum time a student must learn a foreign language. The same sorts of requirements exist

for the social sciences and humanities. The knowledge in all of these areas has been a staple of the American education system.

Moral Education:

Whether or not character or moral education should be a part of the national education system is a question that has been raised more frequently in recent years. The idea of instilling morals and other character qualities in children had, in the past, been left out of public schools, instead taught by churches, community organizations, and families. Within the past few decades, however, there has been a resurgence of the idea that this type of education should take place in public schools. The U.S. Department of Education currently holds the view that “character education must be approached comprehensively to include the emotional, intellectual and moral qualities of a person...It must offer multiple opportunities for students to learn about, discuss and enact positive social behaviors.”(Character Education: Our Shared Responsibility) However, similarly to how it approaches curriculum, the federal government cannot mandate such programs. Instead, the federal government provides funding, in the form of government-sponsored grants, which would allow the states to implement character education programs that will accomplish these goals.

Civic Duties:

The third leg of education, civic duties, has been one of the long-standing cornerstones of the American education system. In recent years, including those under the No Child Left Behind Act, there has been ample emphasis

placed on civic education. The No Child Left Behind Act includes civic education as one of its foundations, stating “it is the purpose of this subpart [Subpart 3 – Civic Education] to improve the quality of civics and government education by educating students about the history and principles of the Constitution of the United States, including the Bill of Rights.” (United States Department of Education 238) Programs such as the “We the People Program,” a elementary and secondary educational civic education program concluding with a simulated Congressional hearing (“We The People”), or “Project Citizen,” which promotes responsible participation in state and local governments (“Project Citizen”), were authorized by the No Child Left Behind Act as a way to promote civic education outside the classroom. As civic education is a keystone of America’s education system, both state and federal governments are making sure that students graduating with the abilities to, as Jefferson described, “understand his duties to his neighbors and country, and to discharge with competence the functions confided to him by either.” (Jefferson)

In general, the United States education system leaves it up to the states to define what constitutes a well-rounded student. However, the federal government, and more importantly, the states, have written their education policies as to place the goals outlined by Jefferson into the foundations for their definition of a well-rounded student. Without a basic knowledge in the subjects of math, science, and reading and writing, moral character, and an

understanding and ability to discharge one's civic duties, a student will not be said to be a well-rounded student.

What is a well-rounded student in China?

Similar to the United States, the People's Republic of China has an education system that is based upon producing students that have more than just book smarts. The recent reforms of the Chinese education system have been aimed at reinventing what is an essential part to the system. When the system was first implemented in the 1950s, Chairman Mao Tse-tung outlined the goals of China's education policy: "Our educational policy must enable everyone who receives an education to develop morally, intellectually, and physically and become a worker with both socialist consciousness and culture."(Mao Zedong) That goal has been transferred into three characteristics that each student should exert by the end of their education. The "three goods," are best deduced from the overall goal of education, as was stated in the 1986 Compulsory Education Law: "the well-rounded development of children and adolescents in morality, intellect, and physical well-being."(National Congress of the People's Republic of China) If a student holds these characteristics, they will be considered a well-rounded student.

The good of intellect (Knowledge):

The good of intellect is one that is the foundation of any education system. Through schooling, students learn a plethora of knowledge in the subjects that will allow students to become the types of people that can function in society. These subjects include a core of reading and writing, math, and science, as

well as other subjects that would lead to satisfying the academic good. Recently, there has been a stress on teaching more scientific subjects, as well as subjects that promote literacy. Through this, the curriculum has been modified to include more time in those subjects, while still leaving ample time for other subjects. Students who excel at these subjects are moved to higher levels of education. Similarly, students cannot move forward with their education without demonstrating proficient knowledge in these subjects.

Good Morals:

The next good, moral character has its ties to the 1950's, when the three-good system was first implemented. During the Mao period, there was a large focus on building a strong moral character. Today, while still loosely connected to Confucian values, moral character touches on a number of personal ideals, ranging from inter-person cooperation to a strong sense of nationalism. In 2004, the Ministry of Education consolidated and refined the official moral ideals into a list of ten guidelines, which were distributed to all schools across the country.

1. "Love the motherland, the people, and the Chinese Communist Party
2. Obey all laws and regulations and enhance awareness of the law. Follow school rules and common social morals.
3. Love science, study hard, enjoy thinking and questioning, enjoy exploration and inquiry, and actively participate in community service and other beneficial activities.
4. Cherish life, live safely, engage in physical exercise, and practice good personal hygiene.
5. Develop self-esteem, self-respect, self-confidence, and self-reliance, and lead a healthy and civilized life.
6. Actively engage in manual labor, be frugal and industrious, and take care of your possessions.
7. Show respect to your parents, teachers, and elders, and be polite.

8. Love the collective, befriend your classmates, and help and care for others.
9. Be honest, practice what you preach, correct your mistakes, and be responsible.
10. Love nature and take care of your environment.”
(China Ministry of Education)

The goal of the original education policies and the modern reforms is to highlight these moral ideals in every student's character.

The Physical Good:

The final of the three goods, physical good, is one that is not generally a foundation of education systems. However, the Chinese system emphasizes physical health as a way to better the communist cause. Both Karl Marx and later Mao Zedong relied strongly on the power of the workers of society, especially as a means to revolution and later maintaining and expanding that society and culture. As such, education was also aimed at making sure that the citizenry could partake in manual labor through physical education classes and allowing sports into schools. Today, this good has dwindled slightly from its prevalence in the 1950's and 1960's, although the goal of having a physically fit society is still evident through the mandatory one-hour daily physical activity session.

Well-rounded students in China vs. US: Differences and Similarities:

As different as the United States and The People's Republic of China seem to be politically, it is surprising how similar their view of educational goals are. Both the U.S. and China regard a well-rounded student as one who embraces a good foundation of knowledge, morals, and health, three things that prepares students to be able to function in their respective societies.

While both the American and Chinese education systems have the general outline for what they consider to be a well-rounded student, their policies must line up with these goals in order to be successful. In terms of these education systems, their policies do tend to line up with their education goals. However, while this may be the case, alignment does not mean that the students graduating from these systems are in fact well rounded. What follows is an investigation into the policies themselves and three negative effects of these policies that result in producing students that are not well rounded.

Chapter 2: The Current U.S. System – No Child Left Behind.

The U.S. Constitution provides a very interesting situation for those trying to create education policy. Through the 10th Amendment to the Constitution, all education policy decisions are essentially left to the states. As such, the federal government is not allowed to mandate what a state's education policy must contain. However, the federal government is allowed to suggest, through the use of monetary funding, what states should include in their education systems in order to meet the goals of education described in the previous chapter.

On January 8, 2002, President George W. Bush signed a law that would change the course of education in the United States for at least the next six years. With the support of 381 Congressmen (United States House of Representatives) and 87 Senators (United States Senate) President Bush firmly stated, “[T]oday begins a new era, a time in public education in our country. As of this hour, America’s schools will be on a new path of reform, and a new path of results.”(United States White House) The result of countless hours of debate, disagreement, and compromise finally paid off, with the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) established as the supreme education law for at least the next six years.

The overall goal of NCLB is to educate all children in the US system. In order to accomplish this goal, the act’s authors created four principle mandates in order to improve the nation’s education system: “NCLB requires states to (a) ensure that highly qualified teachers are in every classroom, (b)

use research-based practices as the foundation of instruction (c) develop tests to assess students so that data-driven decisions become an integral part of the educational system, and (d) hold schools accountable for the performance of all students.” (Yell and Drasgow 1-2) Within the 1100 pages of the act, NCLB contains programs, standards, and regulations for the states to follow and expand upon in order to accomplish these goals and improve the quality of education.

No Child Left Behind’s Strategies to Prepare Well-rounded Students:

As knowledge is the most important purpose of the United States education system, No Child Left Behind includes a mandate regarding the quality of teachers that are teaching students. Using the term “highly qualified teachers,”(HQT) No Child Left Behind mandated that by the 2005-2006 school year, all teachers must meet three criteria to be considered highly qualified. These three qualifications are: “teachers must hold a minimum of a bachelor’s degree from a college or university [in their subject of teaching]...teachers must have full state teacher certification or licensure for the area in which they teach...teachers must be able to demonstrate subject matter competency by passing a state-administered test in each of the core subjects that he or she teaches.” (Yell and Drasgow 45) These three criteria make sure that the teachers transferring knowledge to the students are in fact quite knowledgeable on the subjects they teach. Through making sure a teacher is highly qualified, it ensures that the education received by the student is higher in quality than if taught by someone who has not met these

criteria. As of the 2004-2005 school year, schools were well on their way towards reaching the 100% HQT goals. (Rand Corporation)

Another federal mandate affecting instruction is more aimed at the teaching methods used by teachers, rather than their knowledge. No Child Left Behind wants teachers to use new teaching methods that are “endorsed by scientifically-based research findings,” which will “bring evidence based practices” into classrooms. (Yell and Drasgow 114) The aim with this mandate is to close the gap between “what educators and researchers know works from scientifically-based research” and “what is actually taught in many teacher-preparation programs and then done in classrooms.” (Yell and Drasgow 114) In doing so, it will make sure that the education students receive in schools is founded on scientific proof, rather than the less-sturdy institution of teaching philosophy. This goal is one of the hardest provisions for schools to meet in No Child Left Behind, as ideas about what teaching methods are considered “endorsed by scientifically-based research” changes depending on who is asked. While it may be hard to develop these teaching standards, their use may prove to be helpful in increasing the quality of education that students are receiving.

Accountability Through No Child Left Behind:

In addition to making sure that students are receiving a high quality education through mandating highly qualified teachers and using research based practices, No Child Left Behind contains measures by which the governments can make sure that students in schools are learning a years worth

of content in a years time. Similarly, that policy must contain measures to hold schools accountable to teaching that knowledge in an effective manner. A school's accountability to parents and children is the central part of No Child Left Behind. As President Bush reiterated in his signing speech, "we are asking states to design accountability systems to show parents and teachers whether or not children can read and write and add and subtract." (United States White House) As such, No Child Left Behind contains several provisions to measure student learning, including mandated annual exams.

Standardized statewide exams in the areas of math and reading are conducted annually through grade nine and once between grades ten and twelve. These exams are designed to test the knowledge of the students in each subject using a variety of questioning models. No Child Left Behind requires that the tests "be objective measures of student achievement, knowledge, and skills...[and] be designed to produce individual descriptive and diagnostic student reports." (Yell and Drasgow 23) These requirements make sure that these tests adequately show student's ability as well as display the results in a way that show the schools and parents what can be done to help the child succeed.

The statewide assessments have a much larger purpose than just showing parents a child's strengths and weaknesses. No Child Left Behind places a large amount of emphasis on accountability, especially in terms of student achievement. As such, these standardized exams are ways to make sure that

the Department of Education, states, school boards, and parents know how well a school is performing academically.

In addition to being a guide to parents and students, the test-based accountability system is designed to make sure that 100% of the students in the U.S. education system are “proficient” in reading, math, and science by the year 2014. In order to reach these goals, the state sets proficiency goals that schools must meet annually in order to be able to reach 100% proficiency by 2014. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP), as it is commonly referred to, is an annual goal for the percentage of students at or above proficiency in the three subjects and graduation/retention rates. If schools fail to meet AYP, they are met with “corrective action and restructuring measures aimed at getting them back on course.” (United States White House) These measures include, at a minimum, a two-year improvement plan in the core subjects or, at worse, restructuring the school. (Yell and Drasgow 40) If states, school districts, and schools follow their AYP goals, No Child Left Behind will accomplish its goal of reaching 100% proficiency by 2014.

The ultimate goal of the No Child Left Behind Act is to produce well-rounded students. As such, the four mandates within the No Child Left Behind Act are all aimed at producing students with knowledge, morals, and a sense of civic duty. Knowledge is maintained through both the curriculum and the accountability system. Moral character is built thorough state programs funded by federal grants and extra-curricular activities. Finally, No Child Left Behind uses programs such as the “We The People Program” (“We

The People) and “Project Citizen” (“Project Citizen”) to create and instill in students a sense of civic duty. If all of the provisions of the No Child Left Behind Act are successful, the well-rounded students that graduate from the education system should contain all these qualities.

Chapter 3: The Chinese Education System and the Current Reforms:

The People's Republic of China is home to the largest education system in the world. Out of the 1.4 billion people living within its borders, there are approximately 367 million below the age of 18. As of 2004, the Asia Society estimated there were approximately 235 million students enrolled in approximately 607,000 preschool, primary, middle, and high schools across the country, which is approximately five times the size of its United States counterpart. With so many students, the Ministry of Education has the incredibly hard task of creating and implementing education policy for a system serving close to 20% of the world's students. (Asia Society 11)

In 1986 the China Communist Party (CCP) undertook sweeping education reform as part of a compulsory education law. Before this point, education in China had been a part of life that was only fully utilized by the upper echelons of society. As such, the Central Government took it upon themselves to rid the country of the ills arising from a society consisting mostly of uneducated people.

The Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China

The "Compulsory Education Law of the People's Republic of China" was passed during the Fourth Session of the Sixth National People's Congress in 1986, making it the supreme elementary and secondary education law of the People's Republic of China. The first compulsory education policy in China's history, the Compulsory Education Law mandated that "The state shall institute a system of nine-year compulsory education...The state policy on

education must be implemented to improve the quality of instruction and enable children and adolescents to achieve all-round development – morally, intellectually and physically – so as to lay the foundation for improving the quality of the entire nation.” (China Ministry of Education, Compulsory Education Law, Article 2 and 3) In order to maintain the importance of the “three good,” described last chapter, the Compulsory Education Law made them part of the national curriculum.

The Chinese system differs from its U.S. counterpart in one distinct and important way. In the U.S., the states are left with the ultimate discretion as to what subject matter makes up the curriculum. The federal government can only suggest what policies should be included in the states’ curriculum, although those suggestions can turn into mandates by using federal funding containing conditions. In China, the education system has historically been a top-down system where the Central Government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) dictates the national education curriculum to the provincial education offices, which further pass the policy on to the localities. As the Compulsory Education Law mandates, “The department in charge of education under the State Council shall, in accordance with the needs of the socialist modernization and with the physical and mental development of children and adolescents, decide on the teaching methods, the courses to be offered and their content, and the selection of textbooks for compulsory education.”(China Ministry of Education, Compulsory Education Law, Article 8) Instead of leaving the curricular decisions up to the provinces, as the U.S.

federal government does with the states, the Central Government, through the Ministry of Education, has taken it upon themselves to develop the nation-wide curriculum.

The Education Law of the People’s Republic of China on Well-rounded Students:

In 1995, during the Third Session of the Eighth National People’s Congress, the “Education Law of the People’s Republic of China” was adopted as the newest education law. The law reinforced the ideals set forth by the Compulsory Education Law as well as went into more detail as to what the elementary and secondary education curriculum should entail. Split among three different Articles, the law outlines three important curricular areas: Well-rounded development, patriotism, and respect of history and cultural tradition.

The Three Good:

“**Article 5:** Education must serve the socialist modernization drive and must be combined with production and physical labor in order to train for the socialist cause builders and successors who are developed in an all-around way—morally, intellectually and physically.”

(Ministry of Education, Education Law, Chapter 1)

There are two important factors that went into the incorporation of Article 5 into the national education law. The “three good” ideals of education have become a cornerstone of the Chinese education system since their introduction under Mao fifty years ago. In order to best help progress the country forward, both economically and culturally, the Ministry of Education had to maintain them into the new system. A person’s intellect, physical fitness, and morality

will be able to apply those characteristics to their jobs or lifestyle as to help promote China's success in their own way.

China, as with most countries, has historically been a society whose education policies tend to adapt to the current trends of the nation. The positive effects of Deng Xiaoping's "opening up" strategy have come to fruition in the 1990's and China's policies have reflected that need to maintain a successful economy. Education must thus "serve the socialist modernization drive" in order to maintain the current economic growth. This has been realized as a need to produce students who are willing and able to participate in society in a way that will continue the current economic trend.

With the new focus on preparing students to be helpful in a scientific-based workforce, the Ministry of Education has made a shift in what teaching methods are to be used. As China becomes more competitive in scientific fields, producing students with a good knowledge base in these areas is essential. While not fully leaving other subjects behind, there is a new focus on "establish[ing] a scientific school system." (China Ministry of Education, Education Law, Chapter 2) In such a system, there is extra emphasis placed on the scientific subjects, including mathematics. A synopsis of the current scientific curriculum by Asia Society shows just how much emphasis is placed on scientific knowledge: "All Chinese students in grades 7-9 are expected to take foundational two-year sequences in biology, chemistry, and physics. In grades 10-11, students must take six credits (108 hours) in each of these three subjects; additional science modules (generally two credits or

some 40 hours) are optional.” (Asia Society 16) A similar set of requirements exists for the mathematics as well. This science and math-emphasized curriculum will, in the minds of the Central Government, best produce graduates capable of helping China succeed in a global economy.

Couple that with the continuous emphasis by the Central Government on eliminating illiteracy, and the three core subjects are established as: Science, Math, and Reading and Writing. All three constitute what the Central Government believes are the subjects of “intellect” as part of curriculum that satisfy the first of the “three good.”

Patriotic Connection:

“**Article 6:** The State conducts education among educates in patriotism, collectivism, socialism as well as in the importance of ideals, ethics, discipline, the legal system, national defense and national unity.”

(China Ministry of Education, Education Law, Chapter 1)

The Chinese Communist Party, like any dictatorship, survives through support from the people. When there is no institutional form of a check on a governing party, such as a system of elections, then people must have almost absolute faith in their government. Since children are generally the easiest to persuade, the CCP has to try to instill this faith in the younger generation. The new curriculum thus includes instruction techniques and programs aimed at instilling the students with support of the CCP and it’s policies.

Nationalism:

“**Article 7:** In education the brilliant historic and cultural tradition of the Chinese nation shall be inherited and carried forward and all other excellent achievements of human civilization shall be absorbed.”

(China Ministry of Education, Education Law, Chapter 1)

A strong sense of nationalism has been a driving spirit for the Chinese, and the CCP, since the founding of the People's Republic. That mentality helped them survive hardships such as the Long March, the Civil War, attacks from Japan, and many others throughout the long history of the People's Republic history. As such, it is essential that this strong national sentiment be instilled in the next generation. In order to do this, the curriculum includes historical events and cultural traditions aimed at creating the nationalistic sense that has helped China prosper.

These three articles are the most important policies regarding the makeup of their curriculum. The “three good” and nationalism are essential to students being capable of maintaining, if not improving upon, China's position in the world economy and political system. While the details of the curriculum change occasionally, the “three good” and nationalism are ever present. Schools are required to teach within these realms, and students are expected to graduate and carry with them the “three good” and a strong sense of nationalism.

The Role of Testing in China's Education System:

Similar to the U.S., China also has a system of accountability built into their education system. Differing from their counterpart, China's system is designed to hold students accountable, not schools. They make sure that students are acquiring knowledge through a single, extremely competitive college entrance exam. Initially abolished under Mao, the exam was restored

after the turmoil of the Cultural Revolution (Guo 1). Every year, millions of students gather for a three-day exam, taken June 6, 7, and 8, that essentially decides the remainder of their educational career.

Originally focused on three subjects, in 2001 the Ministry of Education adopted a policy that mandates testing in four subject areas. Known as the “3 + X” policy, the exam focuses on three subjects, Chinese Language, Mathematics, and Foreign Language, plus a “X” subject. The “X” subject is a choice between two subjects depending on one’s intended course of study in either the sciences or liberal arts. “‘*Wenke*’ (liberal arts) students add ‘*wenke zonghe*’ (“comprehensive Art”-mixed history and politics together) while ‘*like*’ (science & engineering) students add ‘*like zonghe*’ (“comprehensive Science”-mixed chemistry and physics together).” (Yu and Suen 7-8) The four subject areas on the National College Entrance Exams are designed to test one’s knowledge in addition to their problem solving abilities, two things that are increasingly important in today’s world.

The three curricular requirements coupled with the National College Entrance Exam constitute the basis of the modern education system in China. The ideals of the “three good” are upheld by the curricular requirements, while also being complimented by teaching nationalism and respect of the past. The National College Entrance Exam is designed to make sure that well-rounded students who possess this knowledge are allowed to move on to higher education, while those that don’t are held back as to strengthen those skills. Similarly to the system in the United States, the Chinese system

requires the successful cooperation of all levels of the education system to produce students that are well rounded in nature. Sometimes, as will be discussed in the following chapters, it is not necessarily the lack of cooperation between these multiple parts of the system that affects the quality of students; it is the hidden effects of that cooperation.

Chapter 4: Shrinking Education: The Effects of Testing on the Curriculum and Teaching.

Both the Chinese and United States educational systems rely heavily on a system of standardized exams, using these assessments as a way to ensure that accountability is present. While using high-stakes exams may be a good policy to hold students and schools accountable, the assessments are having some noticeable negative effects on the students they are trying to teach.

Accountability is a noble goal for both No Child Left Behind and the Education Law of China. However, the measures by which accountability is measured should not have any real negative effect on what students are learning. One major criticism of high-stakes testing in public education, more so in the U.S. than in China, is its strangle effect on the curriculum in most schools.

The curriculum set by the government(s) is designed to ensure that the goals of the education system, most importantly the goal of intellectual ability, are taught in the best possible way. In the People's Republic of China, the curriculum includes, but is not limited to, Chinese, math, science, and physical education. The U.S., differing in structure, has a curriculum that varies throughout the States. However, if one was to look at a list of courses for an American high-school, they would find a fairly basic foundation of a curriculum that includes, but not limited to, math, science, reading and writing, social sciences, and the arts.

Negative Effects of Testing on Curriculum and Teaching in the United States:

In the United States, the standardized tests mandated by No Child Left Behind are much more linked to the success or failure of a school than the tests used in the Chinese system. If a school fails to meet the performance goals set forth by the district or the state, they will be subject to corrective actions. On the most basic level, this consists of working with “parents and outside experts...[to]...develop a two-year improvement plan.”(Yell and Dragow 35) If a school fails to meet their goals for multiple years after the first step, there could be consequences as harsh as the restructuring of the school.

These consequences are designed to give schools an incentive to have their students perform well on the tests. In some extreme cases throughout the country No Child Left Behind “links the score on one set of standardized tests to the grade promotion, high school graduation and, in some cases, teacher and principal salaries and tenure decisions.”(Orfield and Wald 39) This places extreme pressure on students, teachers, and most importantly administrators to make sure that their students test well. As would be expected, teachers and the administration would take measures, sometimes controversial, to ensure their school performs well.

Curricular Narrowing:

One such action is narrowing the curriculum. In describing what curricular narrowing consists of, an educator in Colorado shares that their district told

them “to focus on reading, writing, and mathematics. Therefore, science and social studies...don’t get taught.” (Taylor) The idea of this type of curricular contraction stems from the very nature of the tests themselves. In both countries, the standardized assessments test students on math, science, and reading and writing (China also includes a section on a foreign language).

With the tests focusing on these subjects, and the schools stake in making sure that students perform well on tests, it is only natural that the curriculum and teaching styles change as to meet the test. As Michael Romanowski best describes it, “When test scores become the dominant focus of attention in schools, teachers begin to drill their students on test items.” (Romanowski 48) In the case of the U.S., this narrowing occurs when considerably more time is spent teaching the subjects to be tested, “teaching strategies that promote in-depth understanding are set aside, and knowledge that is not tested is ignored.” (*Ibid*)

Much research has been done as to the question of whether or not narrowing of the curriculum is actually occurring. Most of the evidence is anecdotal in nature, not fully relying on quantitative evidence. This leads supporters of No Child Left Behind to argue that the policy is not having as devastating an effect on the curriculum as opponents claim. However, there are two studies, one by The Center for Public Education and another by Wayne Au, which rely strongly on quantitative evidence.

Their findings lead one to believe that the contraction of a school’s curriculum to meet the test is actually occurring in a majority of American

schools. The Center for Public Education cites that a survey in which “responding to questions about the impact of the No Child Left Behind Act, a large majority of districts – 71 percent – reported that NCLB’s testing requirements have led them to increase curricular time spent on reading and math for students at risk of failing, and decrease time for other subjects.” (Mitchell 2) Similarly, Au found that of the 34 studies, approximately 70% of the studies analyzed, all of which were quantitative survey-based studies regarding the effects of No Child Left Behind, show that “the tests have the predominant effect of narrowing curricular content to those subjects included in the tests.” (Au 264) This means that there are many districts throughout the country that are forcing their students to spend more time on the three tested subjects for the benefit of the schools, rather than the students.

“Teach to the Test” and “Drill and Kill:”

Another method, which is closely tied to that of a narrowing curriculum, is the one by which knowledge is transferred from the teacher to the student. With the need for students to know necessary information for the assessments, teachers have resorted to a method of teaching called the “drill and kill” method. This type of memorization-based teaching involves the “drilling” certain knowledge and test-taking skills into students via rote memorization and consistently returning to it multiple times, thus “killing” it to the point that the student cannot forget it. This teaching method, especially connected with a narrowing curriculum, leads to an even larger gap in a student’s knowledge as students are taught what the conclusion is, not how it is reached.

Negative Effects of Testing on the Curriculum and Teaching in China:

In China, the teaching practices that are used in the United States exist, but on a much larger scale. Due largely in part to the extreme importance of the college entrance exams, Chinese students, and similarly schools, are under a lot of pressure to perform well. Since, “failure to pass China’s college-entrance examination denies a student university admission, limiting future employment to lowly status and low-paying jobs,” (Romanowski 49) students must use every trick in the book to prepare. One such way is to limit what they focus on in their education by “depend[ing] on teachers to provide the correct answer, and are only concerned with learning knowledge for their exams.” (*Ibid*)

This need to focus on tested subjects in Chinese schools is not only limited to students. The views of many teachers within the People’s Republic of China fit into one theoretical view that “quality education ought to include and incorporate exam-oriented education or the sort of education whose goal is to prepare students for coping with exams.” (Zhifu 15) What comes from the combination of the views of both students and teachers is a term described by Romanowski as “duck-stuffing.” Romanowski refers to this teaching method as “duck-stuffing” because “of the lifeless way students are filled with information,” meaning the way, “teachers stuff student’s heads with knowledge so they can regurgitate the same and secure a passing score on the comprehensive examinations.” This is much more severe than the “drill and kill” method that has become more and more common in the United States, as

the stakes for the students are much higher for Chinese students. Regardless of the stakes, the students who are learning under any of these methods are certainly not receiving an education that would be considered well rounded by the teaching philosophies of either country.

What Students are Missing Because of Standardized Testing:

As described in Chapter One, both the United States and the People's Republic of China place a great deal of emphasis on the intellectual abilities of their students as a large portion of being considered well-rounded. With these methods occurring, there is no reason to suspect that the education these students are receiving is satisfying that goal. The idea that math, science, and reading and writing are the only necessary subjects to being considered intellectual is illogical. There have been many connections drawn between the necessities of an education that includes the arts. In many cases, "researches have found correlations between instruction of subjects such as the arts and high levels of achievement in reading and mathematics. (King and Zucker 6) In terms of the U.S. system of accountability, it is possible that in favoring tested subjects over others, schools are shooting themselves in the foot, leaving out subjects that could lead to even better test scores.

For the future success of students, focusing on the tested subjects also severely diminishes their potential. While the students in China may test better and be admitted to better colleges, it is the foundation of knowledge that will be missing in the areas of critical thinking, creativity, and problem solving. Spending a majority of time and energy making sure that students

know the standards, instead of fostering other creative abilities, shows them that following standards takes precedence over being innovative, creative, and thinking “outside the box.” While the students may perform well on their tests, getting them into a good university and possibly a good job, creativity and critical thinking are skills that are essential to maintaining and succeeding at a good job.

The United States finds itself in a situation where another goal of education, in addition to not reaching the goal of proficient intellectual ability is not being satisfied. In spending so much time on the tested subjects, those classes that teach the sense of civic duty necessary in a democracy are being squandered as much as classes teaching the arts. In a democratic society that, by nature, survives on participation and a good understanding of how the system functions, leaving out the subjects that provide people with that understanding could have lasting effects. “When schools focus on test scores and fail to develop students’ independent minds and critical thinking skills, they endanger the survival of a democracy because a democracy is only as strong as its citizens are capable of thinking freely and creatively.” (Romanowski 15) If this generation of students is graduating unprepared or under prepared to participate and carry on the democratic tradition, then there are some devastating problems facing the future success of the democratic system.

China has a problem that is similar in nature to the problem in the U.S. Just like a democracy, a communist government requires followers to

continue to stay in power. With students spending so much time studying for their exams, they do not focus on the parts of their education that would make them loyal party followers; choosing to study over partaking in local CCP groups or attending party-sponsored activities. Without that, it is still possible for the graduates to become party members, but an education focused on more than just math, science, and reading and writing, will only help to better tie graduates to the party.

The education that is currently being given to students in both the Chinese and American systems is lacking a great deal to satisfy the educational goal of intellectual ability. By utilizing high-stakes testing as a means for accountability for schools and to test the knowledge of students, both systems are unintentionally limiting the education of their students. In schools across both systems, the tested subjects are focused on a great deal more than those subjects that are not. In doing so, the arts, a student's critical thinking abilities, creativity, and sense of connection to their governing systems is becoming severely hampered. Only by creating a system where high-stakes testing is not the driving force of accountability and testing knowledge can the educational leaders make sure that subjects outside of math, science, and reading and writing are focused on, in turn creating students that are well rounded.

Chapter 5: Nothing But School: Shrinking Opportunities for Extra Curricular Activities, Citizenship, and Public Participation.

The problems caused by high-stakes tests, both in the United States and the People's Republic of China, are not only limited to activities within schools. Curricular narrowing, teaching to the test, and “duck stuffing” teaching methods are all certainly negative effects of the two policies, but the negative influences of the high-stakes tests reach outside the classroom.

Expansion of the School Day to Include Non-Tested Subjects:

As there has been much controversy regarding curricular narrowing, schools in the U.S. have been trying to find ways to make sure that other subjects are included in their curriculum. One problem they have been encountering, however, is that there is just not enough time in a school day. Most U.S. schools have a class day of 6.5 hours for 180 days, while the class day in China is much longer and lasts a full 20 days longer. (Asia Society 17) As schools are spending a majority of their days focusing on the tested subjects, they would need to expand the school day in order to incorporate the other subjects. If schools were to increase their hours, the opportunities for further education outside of the classroom are severely diminished.

The necessity for students to perform well on the standardized tests has led some schools to increase the length of the school day. While the extension of the school day has not occurred across a great deal of the country due to budgetary constraints, the possibility of extending school hours is not out of the question. Some districts in parts of Massachusetts, South Dakota, and

Missouri, have increased their school day by as much as an hour a day. Other districts have been adding on days to the end of the school year, sometimes as many as thirty-five days. (Chmelynski 42)

In the schools that have increased the school day, there has been a glimmer of hope for their test scores. “Results from the first year were encouraging to advocates. Overall, schools with longer days saw improvements in student scores in math, English and science at all grade levels.” However, these results are ones that are premature, as scholars think, “the state needs at least four years to properly assess how the experiment is working.” (Lindsay 1) While the results for the tested subjects are promising, it is important to see how the longer school day affects the other aspects of what makes a student well rounded.

While an hour may not seem like much time, when considering that the amount of homework students are being assigned is also increasing, the time allowed to students to partake in enriching extra curricular activities is severely lessened. In the United States, a great deal of non-traditional education occurs outside of the normal school hours. “Researchers and practitioners argue that high quality, structured OST [Out-of-School Time] programs are environments that have the potential to support and promote youth’s development because they: (a) situate youth in safe environments, (b) prevent youth from engaging in delinquent activities, (c) teach youth general and specific skills, beliefs, and behaviors, and (d) provide opportunities for youth to develop relationships with peers and mentors.” (Simpkins) Similarly,

these programs also act to foster “the strengths of youth, strengths that help young people steer away from undesirable behavior.” (Duncan) These five different aspects of education received by extracurricular activities hit directly at the overall educational goal of moral character.

Moral Education Through Extra-Curricular Activities:

Team sports, religious groups, and other extra-curricular activities are examples of what students use, and school officials rely on, to provide students with the education that cannot be provided by schools. Team sports provide students with the moral skills necessary to interact positively with other members of society. Religious groups instill a sense of spiritual morality needed for a person to fully understand the morality behind many of the fundamental laws of the United States. Other activities focus on the other aspects of morality, helping to build the overall moral character sought by the second goal of the education system. However, if the school day keeps increasing in length, a student’s ability to participate in these activities diminishes, along with the strength of their moral character.

Many studies have been done to see what students and parents think about the value of extracurricular activities. Across the board, their findings have shown that students, as well as parents, greatly value the experiences from these activities. As one student described it, “I feel extracurricular activities actually taught more things that I need for life than curricular studies have. Academics gave me the basics, extracurricular provided the rest.” (McNamara 35) Schools alone cannot teach this type of learning, as the student suggests.

If the school day gets longer, there will not be enough time in the day for students to participate in extracurricular activities, giving them the well-rounded education they need.

Time Crunch for Students in China:

In the People's Republic of China, students are also feeling a time crunch. However, this crunch is not one that is imposed by school officials or the lengthening of the school day. This crunch is more brought upon by the extreme pressure to perform well on the college entrance exams. The narrowing of the curriculum, described in the previous chapter, is the way schools are attempting to help children succeed. However, students and parents seem to feel that is not enough. As such, they are spending more and more time outside of school with tutors and in other private classes aimed at increasing their chances of performing well and getting into a good university.

One such example of the amount of time Chinese students spend studying outside the class is described by Peter Smith: "I spoke to the parents of a junior-high student whose child was receiving tutoring Saturdays and Sundays the entire year of her ninth grade." (Smith 124) This is not an isolated incident, as there are millions of other students who are in the same situation.

Unlike the United States, the teaching of morality and building a moral character takes place largely in schools. Therefore, the immense amount of time spent outside of class to prepare for the standardized tests do not affect one's moral character. Instead, it affects the final goal of China's education system, a student's health.

Loss of Chinese Students' Non-Academic Education:

Education officials and China's Communist Party (CCP) leaders make sure that the physical health of a student is maintained by mandatory physical activity during school. However, their educational policy centered on high-stakes testing is negatively affecting their student's mental health.

When students spend so much time outside of school focused on bettering their understanding of subjects that are taught during school hours, it takes away not only from extra curricular activities but from the children as well. No one doubts that having a high level of knowledge in math, science, and reading and writing is a good thing. However, it is also true that having a high level of knowledge is only part of what makes a person able to function in society.

Across the board, students in China have been receiving less and less time to partake in activities that are not academically based. Activities such as hanging out with one's friends or partaking in sports or non-academic clubs, has an effect on the way a child interacts with other people. Most households in China place academics as a priority above everything else for their child. Therefore, the message parent's are sending to their kids is that one's knowledge is much more important than being able to interact socially with other people.

In an article in the *China Daily* entitled *China's Children Too Busy for Playtime*, Zhuzhu, a twelve-year-old, "has to go to school from Monday to Friday, nine hours a day... she has to get up early for piano lessons on

Saturday and Sunday morning, followed by private extracurricular Maths and English classes in the afternoon.” Allowing for her to have some free time, “as a reward for her hard work, Zhuzhu’s parents let her play with her toys for one hour on Saturday and Sunday evening” because her parents believe “she will have plenty of time to play after she enters university.” (China Daily)

In the same article, there is mention of the devastating effects of the amount of time spent studying on a child’s psyche. “The CYCRC [Chinese Youth and Children Research Center] survey reveals that when they do have spare time to play, many children are either too tired for play, many children are either too tired to play or have nobody to play with – only 4 in 10 of the survey’s participants claim they had friends to play with.” (*Ibid*) Furthermore, the survey showed that the students are mentally drained, saying, “what they [students] want most is, ‘A good night’s sleep.’” The desire for “a good night’s sleep” above anything else is not the sign of a mentally healthy child, especially when that desire is brought about by extreme pressure to perform well on a standardized test.

Both the American and Chinese education systems are relying on a policy that has detrimental effects on the student’s they are trying to help. In the United States, students are unable to partake in morally enriching extracurricular activities because of the possibility of lengthening of the school day. In the People’s Republic of China, the mental health of students is being strained because of the amount of time out of school they are studying for the national college entrance exam. In both cases, with schools and

students focusing on the subjects tested by high-stakes tests, they are turning their backs on the goals that are needed to produce well-rounded students.

Chapter 6: The Effects of Competition on Student Performance

The idea that competition breeds good students is one that has found its way into both the American and Chinese education system. In the United States, The No Child Left Behind Act forces schools to compete for students and the best test scores. China puts the competition to students, forcing them to compete for spots in the nation's colleges. Regardless of who the competition is focused on, schools or students, it has generally negative effects on the types of students being produced.

Competition's Effect on a Students Stress Level in the US:

The education system in the U.S. has become increasingly competitive since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act. While not explicitly mentioned, competition plays a great role in the new system created under the law.

Unlike its Chinese counterpart, the competition is among schools, not among students. The Adequate Yearly Progress goals are designed to push schools to succeed, especially among the other schools in their districts. If other schools in their district consistently outperform them, the school may find themselves with a situation in which students are switching schools. Similarly, if a school continually fails to meet their AYP goals, part of the restructuring plans calls for schools to give parents the explicit option to change schools. Without enough students, schools will be forced to close, putting teachers, administrators, and staff out of a job.

The stress students are placed under is not one that is necessarily healthy. Students get the impression from teachers that they are the only way the school can stay open, since it is their test scores that decide the fate of the school. Teachers and administrators place heavy importance on their test scores, saying to one student that “their lives are basically over if they fail.” (Public Education Network 8)

Telling a child their life will be a failure because of a bad test score is not only untrue, it is devastating to a child’s psyche. If the No Child Left Behind Act’s goal is to produce students who go through school thinking their future is decided by a test, then it has accomplished that goal. However, since the real goal of education in the United States is to produce educated, morally sound, and healthy students, the amount of pressure put on students to pass the standardized tests needs to diminish.

Extreme Competition’s Mental Effects in China:

The People’s Republic of China is widely known as having one of the most competitive education systems in the world. As has already been discussed, the Chinese system relies on a multi-day, highly competitive college entrance exam to decide which college a student will be attending. As such, students place a lot of importance on studying and preparing for this test in order to perform well and get into the best university. This extreme form of competition is not without a dangerous impact on a student’s mental health.

A student’s health is the last of the “Three Good” goals that govern the Chinese education system. Part of that health is a student’s mental health.

However, the extreme competition of the college entrance exam hurts the mental health of the students due to the immense stress that is placed on them to get the best scores. The need for good scores comes from the fact that approximately 9.5 million students apply to take the college entrance exam, all aiming for the approximately 2.6 million places in universities. (Ping)

Chinese students spend a large amount of time both in and out of school preparing for their college entrance exams. In school, students are constantly pressed by teachers and administrators to learn math, science, and the Chinese language. Outside of the nine hours a day students spend in school, they are being individually tutored and attending multiple classes to further their knowledge of the tested subjects. Naturally, students will put themselves through all of this preparation, as their test score will essentially decide their success later in life.

The stress that Chinese students are under can be linked to one undeniable fact, “the test score is pretty much the only thing that colleges look at...every year the futures of millions upon millions of Chinese students hinge on one test.” (China Expat) Low scores “may easily kill a child’s confidence in himself or herself and such confidence is essential to their healthy growth.” (Peter 123) With that much pressure, it is only natural that students would feel a great amount of stress.

Increased Stress:

There has been much research done on the effects of the stressful educational environment Chinese students live in. The results have been

generally negative, showing that the intense competition has led to “an increase in stress, psychological problems and even tragedy.” (China Daily) These trends are not ones that would satisfy the goal of healthy students.

It is not only the fear of scoring low that leads to stressed students, the process by which students prepare for the tests are stressful as well. As has been discussed, Chinese students spend a lot of time outside of the school day partaking in knowledge-increasing activities. Many times, the pressure to partake in these activities comes from those they care about most, their parents and community.

Parents play a large role in a student’s life, especially as it pertains to their outlook of the future. In China, parents see academic success of their child as incredibly important: “72% think it is very important for their children to start academic learning early, and 66% strongly believe that it is vital for their children to do well academically.” This personal emphasis on education further leads to the view among a majority of parents that “their kid must do well to have a successful life.” (USA Today) What follows from this is an extreme amount of pressure put on children by their parents to study and perform well on the tests.

Psychologically, the pressure to perform well has led to many problems. The stress associated with this pressure has led to the result of “some 20 to 30 percent of Chinese students...suffer from various psychological problems.” (People’s Daily) According to a document issued from a joint seminar of American and Chinese psychiatrists, “depression is ranked first among all

psychological illnesses.” (*Ibid*) These psychological problems are associated to the stress taking the college entrance exam places on students.

The Most Extreme Effect:

The extreme stress associated with the need to score well on the exams has resulted in devastating consequences. Recently, there has been much attention paid to the fact that there has been a sharp increase in the number of suicides or tragedies associated to the college entrance exams. The same joint group that declared depression to be the biggest psychological problem among Chinese students went further to say that “suicide is the most serious problem affecting people aged between 15 and 35.” (*Ibid*) In recent years, the prevalence of exam stress-induced suicide has become more and more apparent.

One example of stress getting the best of a student took place in Mingguang City of the Anhui Province. There, a student committed suicide by jumping off a building. “According to the Jinling Evening News, the student’s grades were pretty good. However, he was so worried about the exam that he had difficulty sleeping. He also started having difficulty doing sample test questions.” As a final result, this senior committed suicide, leaving a note to his parents describing the pressure he was under: “Dad and Mom, I am sorry. You have given me so much, but now I’m losing my memory.” (Ping) This is obviously an extreme example, but students across the country are feeling the same sort of stress to perform well, which may lead to suicide.

If an educational policy is putting so much stress on students that they view suicide as an alternative to leading a non-university educated life, then the policy has some obvious problems. Mao and other government leaders have placed much emphasis on the physical health of students. However, one cannot be physically healthy without a great deal of mental fitness as well. The policy of highly competitive testing is eroding the mental health of students, subjecting them to psychological issues and, in extreme cases, suicide.

Both the American and Chinese education systems place a large amount of emphasis on the wellbeing of their students. Physical fitness activities are incorporated into their educational system. However, the highly competitive system both countries rely on has devastating effects on a student's mental health. In the United States, students are under pressure to perform well on tests because they are led to believe that they are the only hope to keep schools from closing. The effects of China's college entrance exam are more lasting, and much more damaging. Psychological problems, depression, and suicide are all among the body of evidence suggesting that students in China are mentally unhealthy. The competitive nature of each country's system needs to diminish; otherwise the students produced by these systems are not going to be healthy individuals.

Chapter 7: Conclusion: How Education Policy Results in Less Well Rounded Students

The education systems that exist in the United States and the People's Republic of China are systems that rely heavily on high-stakes testing and competition to produce the best students possible. The "No Child Left Behind Act" and the "Education Law of the People's Republic of China" are both landmark education laws for their respective countries. Both are aimed at producing the best possible students in relation to their goals of education. However, these laws fall short of producing students that fully embody these goals.

Are They Accomplishing the Goal of Intellect?

The United States sees their goals of education as: Intellectual ability, moral character, and civic duty. The People's Republic of China places emphasis on the "three good" goals of education: intellect, morality, and physical well-being. The curriculum in each country is designed to make sure that the education students receive accomplishes these three goals through both inside and outside of the classroom learning. However well-intentioned the policies may be, they are falling short of accomplishing their educational goals, thus producing students that are not products of a well-rounded education.

The intellectual abilities of students in both systems fall short of what could be considered satisfactory. The high-stakes tests that both systems rely on force the subject matter students are taught to be limited to that which is tested. In the United States, curriculum narrowing and teaching practices such

as teaching to the test and drill and kill, are shrinking the knowledge of a student down to the three core subjects, math, science, and reading and writing. Similarly, students in the People's Republic of China are neglecting other subjects in favor of those that will be tested on the National College Entrance Exam. Those subjects, Chinese language, mathematics, foreign language, and an "X" subject, are seen as the only knowledge one needs to hold in order to be educated.

It has become increasingly apparent that knowledge of other subjects other than reading, writing, math, and science hold great importance later in life. By inadvertently forcing students to focus on the tested subjects, the educational policies of the United States and the People's Republic of China are not producing students that are intellectually well rounded, thus failing to fully accomplish their first goal of education.

Are they Accomplishing the Goal of Morality?

The second common goal of education that the United States and China share is that of morality. In the People's Republic of China, moral education takes place in schools. The teaching of morality is slightly hampered by the same forces that plague the breadth of the curriculum. While not completely halting moral education in Chinese schools, the focus of students on the tested subjects does take away from their focus on their moral education. Similarly, the amount of time students spend outside of the classroom studying subjects learned in school, takes away from the time students could be enriching themselves via extracurricular activities. Students across the board are too

busy with tutors, classes, and other academic activities outside of school that they are unable to partake in character-building activities. There are still morals being instilled in students, as they are inescapable while at school, but students could be more developed morally if they weren't so focused on subjects that are covered by the high-stakes tests.

The demise of moral education in the United States is brought about by a similar set of actions. A great deal of moral education in the U.S. occurs outside of the school day in extracurricular activities and the like, while some still occurs through non-curricular classes in school. As schools feel the pressure to prepare their students for the annual tests, their options are either to increase the school day or to limit the time spent on subjects other than those tested. A longer school day means less time for morally enriching extracurricular activities and a focus on tested subjects shuts out moral character built by knowledge of other subjects. In either case, a student's access to moral education is obstructed by attempts to prepare students for tests.

In the United States and the People's Republic of China, moral character is something that education should aim to foster in students. Both systems, however, fall short of providing students with an adequate moral character. High-stakes tests force students to focus on subjects that are not morally enriching and force actions by schools and students that hinder the ability of students to learn moral character outside of schools. By not providing a sufficient moral character to students prior to graduation, it is hard to say that

either education system accomplishes the goal of instilling morality into their students.

Are they Accomplishing the Goal of Health?

The final goal of both education systems revolves around the health of students. Both systems do an adequate job maintaining the physical fitness of their students through physical education classes and the like. However, the extreme competition of high-stakes tests causes devastating mental harm for students.

Competition may help business succeed in a free-market economy such as that in the United States, but when applied to education, competition hurts the very people it is trying to help. Forcing schools to compete against one another for the best students forces administrators and teachers to place a great deal of stress on students. Making students feel like they will fail at life if they don't score well is psychologically damaging to a child, regardless of their age. Putting that much pressure on students is not healthy, especially in students of younger ages. Without using competition as the way to drive schools to succeed, the mental health of children in the U.S. system will not be as negatively affected.

China's educational system is riddled with negative effects on student's mental health. The fact that less than twenty percent of the students who take the National College Entrance Exam actually get admitted to university leads to students over-extending themselves and reaching to extreme levels of stress in order to score well. The immense competition surrounding the test has led

to extraordinary stress levels among students, which in turn has led to psychological problems and in rare, extreme cases, suicide. A system that has documented evidence of extreme mental problems among a sizeable amount of its students is not one that is looking out for a student's well-being.

Both countries make a serious effort to promote the physical well being of their students. However, the mental health of their students is something to also protect. The competition caused by high-stakes testing is detrimental to the health of students and has proven to have disastrous consequences. The high-stakes tests are ultimately the cause of the mental problems faced by students in both systems. If the competition caused by these tests were severely diminished, or eradicated, the systems would be able to protect and promote their student's health, a goal of education that should be upheld.

The three goals of intellectual ability, morality, and health are the goals that the United States and the People's Republic of China use to determine whether or not they are providing students with a well-rounded education. As has been shown, the current educational policies of these two countries contain shortcomings in all three goals. The students that are graduating have an advanced knowledge of the core subjects, but a lacking knowledge of others. They have an existing moral character, but one that is not adequate considering the amount of importance it plays in the foundation of the education systems. Finally, the students are physically healthy yet in some cases have some serious psychological problems. The students that are

graduating with these attributes are not products of the well-rounded education that the countries claim to have.

Policy Proposals for the Future:

Proposing a broad policy change for both China and the United States would be difficult given the nature of each country's political system and current situation. However, there is one overarching policy change that needs to be made in both countries. This proposal hits at where the focus of educational policy should lie in each country.

As discussed earlier, both countries employ a system-centered set of policies that govern their education system. What needs to occur in each country is a shift away from the system towards the student. The idea that policy can approach an education system from the view that ignores the individuality of students falls far short of educating students effectively. Instead, policy should stop trying to lump students into one group, instead looking at them as individual actors.

Changes for the U.S.:

In the United States, this means looking at the success of schools on more than just test score. Accountability can come from other forms than how students score on standardized tests. Statistics such as retention and graduation rates, student and parent surveys, and other data can be used to judge whether or not a school is adequately doing their job of education students. Realizing that every student excels at some subjects and struggles at others and learns differently will lead to positive policy change. In turn, this

will diminish, if not eradicate, the negative effects discussed above, allowing students to become well rounded.

Changes for China:

In China, the college entrance system needs to radically diminish its reliance on test scores for college admission. Access to higher education has become increasingly competitive over the past decade due to the increase in students wanting to study beyond the nine-year mandate. If scholars are looking for a system for collegiate selection, they only need to find a system that focuses on other selection criteria in addition to a student's test results. Adopting a student-centered policy of looking at sets of criteria that is individual in nature, will not only diminish the importance and stress surrounding for students surrounding the exams, but also improve the quality of students being admitted to higher education institutions.

If they need a stepping-stone, they only need look across the Pacific Ocean to the United States. While the United States system isn't perfect, students are judged on a wide range of criteria, from grades to test scores extracurricular activities to leadership abilities, all of which are taken into account in a university's decision. If the Chinese could adopt a similar system that looks at more than just a student's test scores, the amount of pressure put on children to test well will diminish, potentially to a point that would lessen the damage done to a child's intellect, morality, and health.

Both systems need to shift from a system-centered policy approach to one that is much more student-based. Education is essential to forming the

foundation for human knowledge and action, and the systems used by the United States and The People's Republic of China are missing the mark in this regard. The detriments to education brought about by the reliance on high-stakes testing will have lasting impact on students as they proceed into higher education and later to their chosen career. Fitting the system to the individuality of the students as opposed to trying to fit the students to the system will result in a better education and experience for everyone involved.

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Capstone Project Summary:

In a day and age when the importance of education's role in society is becoming more pronounced, the problems with a country's education policies need to be examined. This examination needs to occur as the problems found may translate into societal problems in the future. In my Honors Capstone Project, entitled *The Gap Between the Ideal and the Reality: How High Stakes Testing Causes the United States and China to Fall Short of Creating Well-Rounded Students*, I will examine the education policies of the United States and The People's Republic of China, as both education systems rely heavily on standardized testing to instill accountability and gauge student performance.

When one looks at comparable education systems, the pair of the Chinese and American education systems is not one that instantly comes to mind. The countries are quite different: Capitalist vs. Socialist, Democratic vs. Communist, and a population of 500 million vs. one of 1.4 billion. However, the education policies of these two systems are quite comparable.

On the surface, both policies are ones that focus on designing an overall system of education as opposed to creating policies that ensure individualized student achievement. On one hand, the education systems that have been established in both countries are strong and ensure that students are receiving an adequate education. On the other, a system-centered education policy has the effect of treating students as if they are the same, diminishing the individuality, and thus quality, of the education received by any given student.

On a deeper level, both systems have a similar idea of what constitutes a well-rounded student. This view of a well-rounded student consists of three criteria: intellect, moral character, and health. The No Child Left Behind Act of the United States established these three goals, as well as a goal of civic education, as the fundamental goals of the U.S. education system. Similarly, the Education Law of the People's Republic of China employs the "Three Good" system, which continues the educational tradition of promoting intellect, moral character, and health as the prominent education goals.

One main aspect to both the U.S. and China's education policies is their emphasis on standardized testing. In the U.S., these tests are designed to ensure a system of accountability, meaning that schools are to be held accountable for providing an adequate education. In China, the most prominent test, the National College Entrance Exam, serves the purpose of testing the knowledge the students have received and then deciding which university, if any, the student will be attending. In both systems, the pressure to test well on these examinations is high, with a great majority of that pressure being placed on students. Within my examination of these policies, it becomes clear that their reliance on standardized testing exacts heavy tolls on the very students they are trying to educate.

The first criticism of the tests centers around a trend known throughout the United States as "Curriculum Narrowing." This trend is based on the fact that the standardized tests are narrowing the scope of student learning from a wide breadth of subjects down to those subjects that are being tested. In the United

States, schools further this trend in an effort to increase students' scores on the standardized tests. Conversely, curricular narrowing occurs in the People's Republic of China not due to actions of the schools, but from the student's necessity to score well. While other subjects are available to students during the school day, the subjects that students focus on are only those that they will be tested on. Regardless of which way curricular narrowing occurs, the extreme pressure placed on students to test well forces schools and students to turn their backs on subjects that are not tested in favor of those that are.

Secondly, along the same lines as curricular narrowing, students are spending less time outside of school partaking in extracurricular activities. These activities, which include sports, clubs, and other organized activities, are responsible for providing non-academic knowledge such as teamwork and moral character. Preparing for the National College Entrance Exam, students in China spend as much time as possible outside of the classroom with tutors, in private classes, and participating in other activities designed to build their knowledge in the tested subjects. Their American counterparts are feeling a similar time crunch brought about by an increase in homework and an extended school day, which is designed to fit non-tested subjects into the school day. Because of these trends, American and Chinese students are not easily able to partake in activities that will provide them with skills and knowledge that would make them more able to function in society.

Finally, the pressure to test well has had devastating health effects for both American and Chinese students. Students are under extreme amounts of stress

in the United States, brought about by the pressure from schools, which rely on student test scores for funding and other necessities. Chinese students are under exceptionally more stress, as their score on the National College Entrance Exam will decide their future success. The stress on Chinese students has reached critical stages in some cases, with stress and bad scores leading some students to view suicide as a viable option. Students of this age should not be subjected to this amount of stress, as it is incredibly unhealthy and counterproductive to one of the primary goals of education.

Methods and Significance:

The primary research for this project comes from the wealth of information regarding the goals of education in the United States and China, the current policies, and the effects of standardized testing on students. The effects of testing on student performance in the United States have been discussed widely since the passing of No Child Left Behind. The evaluations of China's policies have also recently been conducted, as there has been a lot of press surrounding the increase in student suicide and tragedy tied to the National College Entrance Exam.

What makes this project significant is the fact that the information regarding the effects of high-stakes tests on students is largely scattered, with the three main critiques of standardized testing not being included together in one work. Similarly, there is not much comparison of the education policies of the United States and The People's Republic of China, as they are not generally seen as comparable education systems. What I hope to show in this

work is that they are comparable, and that their comparison is necessary as the two countries compete for both economic and political dominance in the international community.