By Michael McGill
Superintendent, Scarsdale Public Schools

Education is a process of realizing potential and transforming lives that empowers people to succeed and contribute in the global community.

Current federal and state policies fail to promote this kind of education. In fact, after almost three decades of experience with extensive standardized testing, high-stakes consequences and teacher and school competition, there’s little evidence that these strategies have made learning in our district, state or country any deeper, richer or stronger. Too often, they’ve turned out to undermine it.

Standardized test results offer a limited view of learning. Research amply demonstrates that high-stakes standardized tests (any with significant consequences for students, teachers or schools) cause teachers to narrow curriculum and to focus on test prep. Efforts to link teacher ratings statistically to students’ standardized test scores are demonstrably flawed.

We in the Scarsdale Schools community reaffirm our conviction that a quality education is about preparing people fully for life before and after tests. Evaluation is a part of this endeavor, and standardized tests can help us assess students’ progress. Nonetheless, other more powerful measures – which we in Scarsdale continue to develop – are more useful for understanding academic growth and pupil needs.

We view the practice of using standardized tests for high-stakes decisions as unsound because of its well-documented shortcomings. We remain committed to providing our own students a deep, rich education; to regard standardized tests as single, limited measures of limited areas of learning; and to continue to let the scores take care of themselves. The federal and state governments may require us to use standardized tests, but we can’t be required to confer a kind of value on the results that they don’t actually have.