

## PEARSON STORY YOU ASKED FOR!

### Pearson just lost most of its Texas testing business.

For the first time in three decades, a new company is poised to develop and administer the state-required exams Texas students begin taking in the third grade.

The state is in negotiations with Educational Testing Service, or ETS, to take over the bulk of the four-year, \$340 million student assessment contract, the Texas Education Agency announced Monday. Company Vice President John Oswald said ETS is “privileged and honored” to land the work. Final contracts are still being negotiated.

The London-based Pearson Education has held the state’s largest education-related contract — most recently, a five-year, \$468 million deal to provide state exams through 2015 — since Texas began requiring state student assessments in the 1980s. Under the new agreement, the company would still develop the state’s assessments designed for special needs and foreign students. That portion of the contract is worth about \$60 million.

Here is the puzzling question: Why did it cost \$468 million for a five-year contract with Pearson when New York State pays Pearson “only” \$32 million for a five-year contract? Does New York have smarter negotiators?

Does Pearson have better lobbyists in Texas than in New York? Does New York get Texas’s used questions? True, Texas has more children than New York, but not 15 times more. Can anyone explain? **(Diane Ravitch’s Blog May 18, 2015 )**

The four corporations that dominate the U.S. standardized testing market spend millions of dollars lobbying state and federal officials — as well as sometimes hiring them — to persuade them to favor policies that include mandated student assessments, helping to fuel a nearly \$2 billion annual testing business, a new analysis shows.

The analysis, done by the Center for Media and Democracy, a nonprofit liberal watchdog and advocacy agency based in Wisconsin that tracks corporate influence on public policy, *says that four companies — Pearson*



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*Service), Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, and McGraw-Hill— collectively spent more than \$20 million lobbying in states and on Capitol Hill from 2009 to 2014.*

When I visited Texas a few years ago, I wondered why Texas paid nearly \$500 million to Pearson for five years of testing, but New York paid only \$32 million to Pearson for the same five years. I assumed it must be a testament to the high quality lobbyists that Pearson hired in Texas, starting with Sandy Kress, who was one of the architects of No Child Left Behind and very well connected to the state's power structure (**Diane Ravitch's blog April 16, 2015**).

Jason Stanford has written a jaw-dropping [article](#) about what happened to the professor who debunked standardized testing. It's not pretty.

Walter Stroup, a professor at the University of Texas College of Education, made a remarkable discovery about standardized tests: "what the tests measured was not what students have learned but how well students take tests."

He shared what he learned with the Texas legislature in 2012, as the testing rebellion was heating up across the state among parents. Legislators had long clung to the dogma that the way to improve test scores was to test more and make the tests harder. The state had recently signed a big contract with Pearson to deliver the tests.

"Stroup testified that for \$468 million the Legislature had bought a pile of stress and wasted time from Pearson Education, the biggest player in the standardized-testing industry."

After 15 years of high-stakes testing, the state was still waiting for the promised results. What they got instead was a huge number of students who could not graduate high school and a parent uprising against testing.

What happened to Stroup was alarming. Pearson tried to discredit his research. Pearson has some high-powered lobbyists on its payroll in Texas.

"Stroup had picked a fight with a special interest in front of politicians. The winner wouldn't be determined by reason and science but by politics and power. Pearson's real counterattack took place largely out of public view, where the company attempted to discredit Stroup's research. Instead of a public debate, Pearson used its money and influence to engage in the time-honored academic tradition of trashing its rival's work and career behind his back."

But even more alarming, the Pearson Foundationade was already a major benefactor of Stroup's employer, the University of Texas College of Education. Thus, Stroup lost his tenure. (**Diane Ravitch's blog, September 5, 2014**).