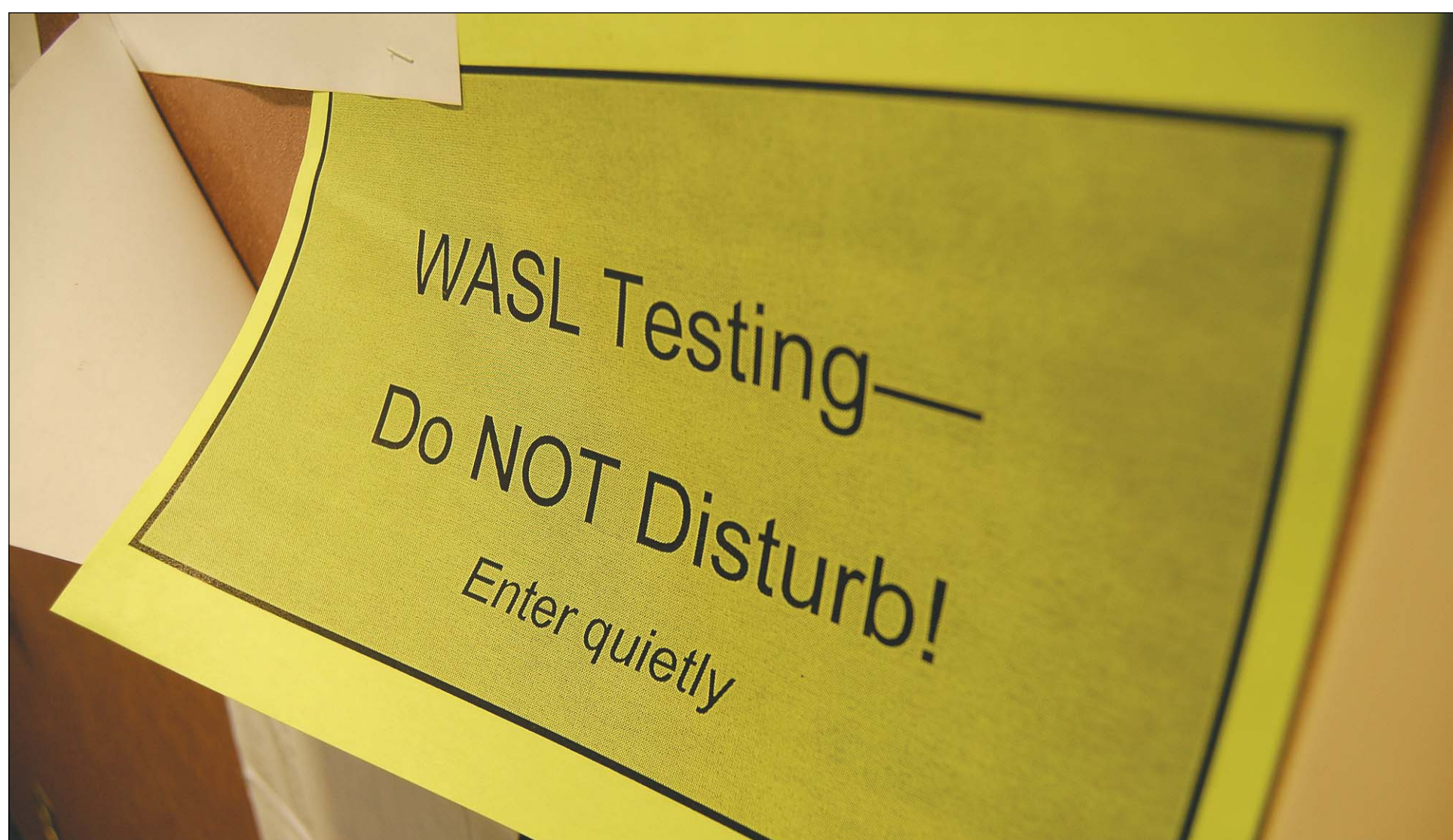


The WASL: A failure of a test

Until improved, WASL should not be a graduation requirement



Lauren Colton / Photo Editor

The WASL seems to leave some overlooked students behind. Homeschooled students and private school students seem to skate over the new graduation requirement.



JENNIFER
HELTON
Mead

It is every Washington public school student's least favorite four-letter combination: WASL.

The thing is, Washington students deserve to feel a little animosity toward the WASL.

To this day I remember my third and fourth grade teachers telling me not to stress out about taking the WASL.

They told my fellow students and I that the test was in place to test the teachers and curriculum, not the students.

The fact that these two teachers came from different schools in different sides of the state seemed to verify that fact. This is the main reason that I am now very, very confused. If this test is in place to test the teachers, then why is my high school diploma at risk?

I turned to the WASL FAQs page on the Superintendent of Public In-

struction website to see if some of my concerns were posted. As it turns out, they were.

Question number 14: "What happens if a parent refuses to have his/her child take the WASL?"

Answer number 14: "High school students who do not take and pass the High School WASL will not graduate."

Okay, they have made that pretty clear since that little rule passed. It was question number 22 that really caught my attention, however.

"Do private-school students have to take the WASL?"

"No, private-school and home-schooled students are exempt from the WASL."

Now wait a minute - are we shipping all of the private school students out of the state now?

The kids at St. George's must be really tired of saying this, so I'll do it for them. Private school students are people too. I can understand the freshmen's confusion on this concept,

but who knew we'd have to convince the superintendent too?

I really don't have a problem with the private schooled students, but the fact that the home schooled students do not have to take this test does bother me, and not because I'm jealous.

The idea behind Bush's No Child Left Behind Act is to leave no children without a satisfactory education. Not only are some home-schooled students being left behind, but forgotten altogether.

I talked to Nina Neff who was home-schooled during high school. She explained that not only do home-schooled students not have to take the WASL, they don't have to take any type of test that confirms that they are learning what they need to be, or learning anything at all for that matter.

Nina explained that weekly visits to a counselor to confirm that she was learning the appropriate material were only optional, and agreed that the system could be "easily exploited"

by families that simply didn't want their children to go to public school.

If any Washington children should be taking this test, shouldn't it be the home-schooled students who may or may not be learning anything?

On a completely different scale, there are some students who shouldn't be taking the WASL. Specifically, those students who are mentally disabled. You would think that these students, some who are on fourth grade reading and second grade math curriculum, would be immediately exempt from the WASL. Not so. Mentally disabled students are required to take a test like the WASL, where the content is a little easier. Some may forget, however, that some disabled students cannot comprehend or follow the instructions that the test is requiring of them.

In an ironic twist, the WASL can even be said to be hurting students' education.

It takes away from learning time (in my school, upperclassmen are not

even required to show up to school for three days during testing in April) and the test questions in the math portion of the test do not correspond to the type of math problems that students are learning in school.

This results in one of two ways. Teachers continue teaching the way they are, and math scores suffer; or teachers change the way they teach math.

By looking at the current math scores, it is obvious that math teachers are not changing the way they teach, and they shouldn't. The state officials in charge of making the WASL need to change the questions to fit the state curriculum - not the other way around.

The concept behind the WASL may be great, but the state needs to realize that until the "bumps in the road" are smoothed out, the WASL should not be used to determine whether students graduate or not.

Seven ways to boycott the WASL



DANIELLE
PRICE
Mt. Spokane

Ahhh, the WASL. While juniors and seniors look forward to arriving at school late, freshmen and sophomores groan as the mandated state test approaches. Their complaints are familiar:

"What's the point?"

"It doesn't measure how much you've learned, just how well your teachers taught you!"

"I don't get it!"

Yes, I have said all those lines before. For I was once a sophomore forced to take this test. I even failed it the first time and had to retake the math portion in the summer. So I feel your pain. And out of my vast

experience, I have KNOWLEDGE. More specifically, the knowledge of how to boycott the WASL in ways your school district won't soon forget. So sit back, my sophomore friends, and bask in the glory of my wisdom.

Ways to Boycott/Protest/Avoid Taking the WASL

1. Don't show up.

This one seems pretty obvious. The only drawback is that unless you have pneumonia, Asian Bird Flu or West Nile Virus, your mom won't believe that you've had "a cold" for four days straight.

2. Run off to Canada.

Hey, it worked for draft dodgers during the Vietnam War, so why shouldn't it work for you?

3. Eat your test booklet.

With a little hot sauce, it might not be too bad. This has the added advantage of convincing the proctors you are insane.

4. Tell them you can't take it for personal, religious or philosophical reasons.

You might not want to say your religion prohibits standardized tests, though, since the proctors tend to look into that. But if you say you can't take the test because your mom believes it destroys a child's psyche ... well, they just might fall for that.

5. Fail on purpose.

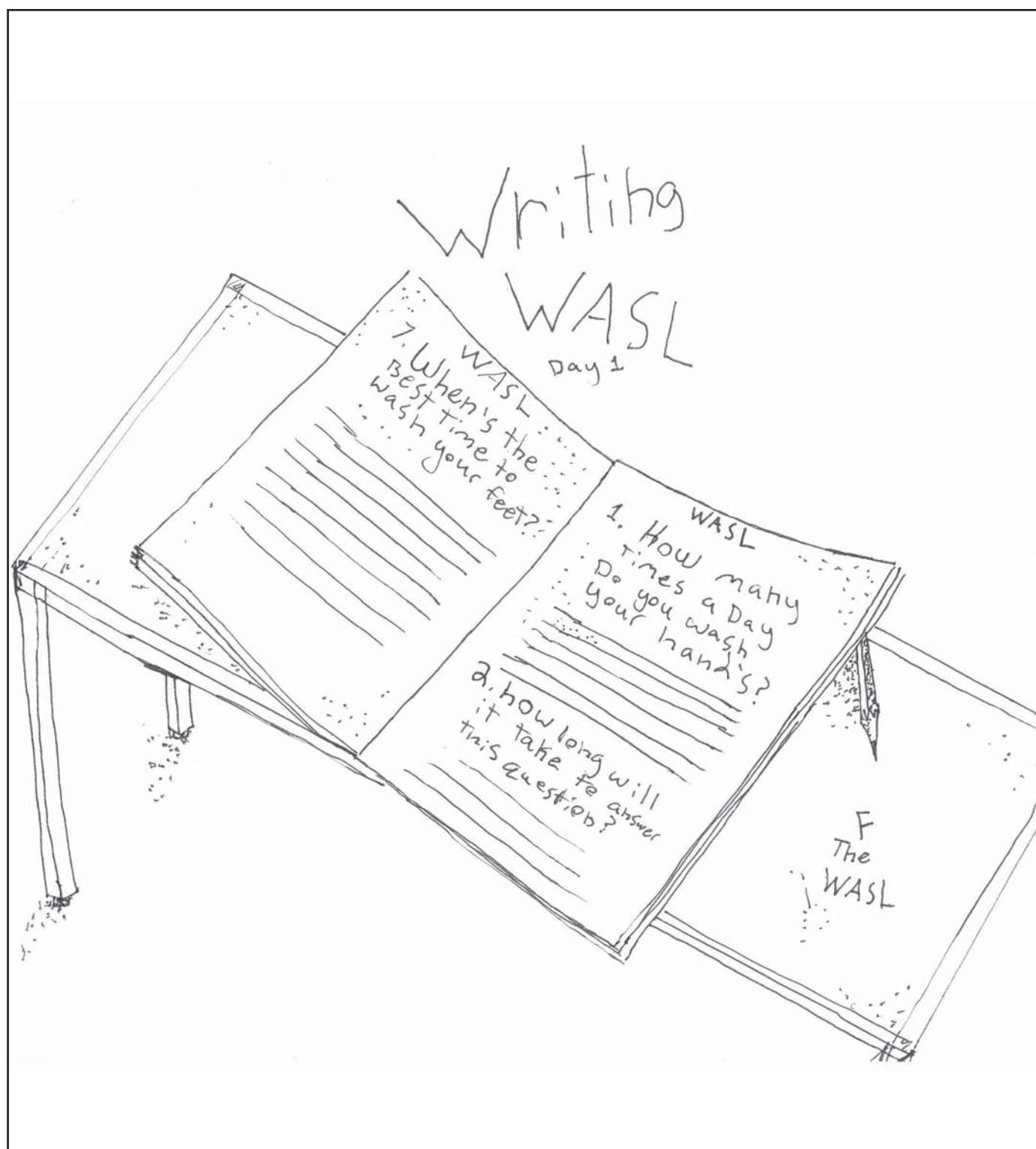
I wouldn't recommend this one, because it would be hard to get everyone in your class on your side. And if you're the only one writing love letters to Angelina Jolie or Frodo Baggins in the extended response section, your parents would not be too happy.

6. Go to another school.

If you have friends who go to a different school, trade schools with them for a day and take each other's tests. Imagine the look on the face of that guy who grades your test when he reads "I don't know the answer to this one, but my friend Joey does. Since this is his test, why don't you ask him?"

7. Make the President take it.

The test was developed in part due to the No Child Left Behind Act. And with the leader of the free world taking your test for you, success is guaranteed.



Philip Glenn / Lewis and Clark