

States leaving standardized tests behind

By Haley Sweetland Edwards, Time

If you had wandered late last year into Matthew Tosiello's third-grade science class at Abingdon Elementary School in Virginia, you would have encountered an army of frogs. Origami frogs, that is—palm-size critters made of green index cards, each equipped with a tongue made of either masking tape or water-sodden paper.

Tosiello had asked his 8- and 9-year-old students to design an experiment to determine which natural adaptation—a sticky tongue or a wet tongue—was better for lapping up flies, a role played by eraser-size chads left over from a three-hole punch. The kids then had to describe their hypotheses, methods and findings in a lab report.

It may not have looked like it from a distance—there were no blue books or timed segments, and the classroom was far from silent—but the origami-frog project was actually an exam. A Virginia law that went into effect this year eliminated a handful of mandatory, fill-in-the-bubble standardized tests in public schools, including one for third-grade science. Instead, the law asked teachers to perform “alternative assessments”—performance-based projects to monitor students' progress.

In the origami-frog unit, for example, Tosiello was able to determine which students were struggling with mathematical concepts like symmetry or measurement (frogs had to be folded precisely, with their tongues exactly 6 cm by 2.5 cm) and which grasped the more complex scientific ideas. “It's a more appropriate way of looking at a student's growth,” explained Joanne Uyeda, the principal at Abingdon Elementary. “It's more

authentic.”

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