

The following opinion piece was sent as a press release on June 4, 2001, from the offices of **Sen. Harold Hochstatter** (R – Moses Lake) and **Sen. Val Stevens** (R – Arlington). Although the specific supporting statistics cited are somewhat dated, the problem they illustrate has not been solved. The WASL is still biased against boys.

Boy are you dumb! Boy, you *are* dumb. You are dumb, boy.

Writing is easy. Just take common words and string them together so they convey the meaning you want. But the above message isn't popular no matter how you arrange the words. The people who gave us Washington's Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) have known about dumb boys for years. I just found out today.

I found out that only 21.8 percent of boys passed the 7th grade writing portion of the WASL, compared to 41.5 percent for the girls. The next year, those percentages reached 27 and 47 for boys and girls respectively. The year after that, the numbers were even worse! Only 32.5 percent of the boys passed the test compared to 54.1 percent for the girls. In a way, I feel like a boy who isn't going to college because he can't write. But wait a minute, maybe he can write. Maybe he just can't WASL. When similar age groups in Washington take the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) test, statistics consistently show a two to three percent gender variation in scores. That's hardly biased compared to the WASL, which shows scored differences between boys and girls from 80-90 percent in some cases.

These huge differences should raise some questions. Are boys and girls the same or are the genders different? Are boys dumb? Of course not! Is Washington's WASL gender-biased, invalid, unreliable, subjective, and dangerous? Don't ask me. But parents, students, and taxpayers need some answers before we subject our children to a process that prefers one gender over another by a ratio of 6-to-1.

There is, however, an alternative to asking questions, pointing fingers, and stating facts. We could do nothing at all. Like Superintendent Bergeson, who is responsible for fairness and equity in the administration of the WASL, we could turn up our collar against the truth. We could save face rather than save students.

Education restructuring rolls along like a freight train without a driver, propelled by test scores that equate maleness with failure. To shout bias in the politically correct halls of education could be dangerous for anyone. I hope that more than just parents of boys are listening.