

## Directions

1. **Read** the following article.
2. **Show** evidence of close reading by marking your text. Don't forget to also mark areas of the text that are confusing for you.
3. **Write an argument** for or against the issue of using color-coded high school ID cards to sort students by test performance. (This will be a one- to two-page paper in which you cite examples from the article to support your view.)

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# Color Coded High School ID Cards Sort Students by Test Performance

By **Anthony Cody** on October 6, 2011 7:53 PM

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[http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/2011/10/color\\_coded\\_high\\_school\\_id\\_car.html?cmp=ENL-EU-VIEWS2](http://blogs.edweek.org/teachers/living-in-dialogue/2011/10/color_coded_high_school_id_car.html?cmp=ENL-EU-VIEWS2)

1 A high school in La Palma, California, is **coming under fire** for a system that publicly identifies and  
2 treats students differently according to their scores on the state standardized tests. Students who perform  
3 at the highest levels in all subjects receive a black or platinum ID card, while those who score a mix of  
4 proficient and advanced receive a gold card. Students who score "basic" or below receive a white ID card.  
5  
6 Students with black or gold cards get certain privileges, such as free entrance to sporting events and  
7 discounts at local business events. Those with white ID cards get no such privileges, and have a  
8 designated line in the cafeteria, while the elite black and gold cardholders have a different line. The  
9 majority of students at the school have white cards, so guess which line is longer? A school administrator  
10 reportedly advised female students at an assembly to go to dances with boys with black cards rather than  
11 white cards. Parents have complained that this is akin to bullying, and that low performing and learning  
12 disabled students feel stigmatized by the program.  
13  
14 Reporter Scott Martindale at the Orange County Register **broke this story Tuesday**, and followed up  
15 yesterday by speaking with a motivational expert who raised concerns about the program. But the  
16 principal, **Ben Carpenter, defended the program vigorously**, asserting that it has helped the school  
17 raise its API score from 880 to 895.

18 Principal Carpenter pointed out that prior to the program, many students did not care about their test  
19 scores. He said, There was nothing in it for them, other than an intrinsic motivation they may or may not  
20 have. The intent of the gold card program was to provide an incentive for all students, to say, "Hey, there  
21 is something in this for me. I can get something out of performing on this exam."

22

23 This program addresses a genuine problem. Many of our students do not see a connection between their  
24 performance on standardized tests and their own lives. They are not motivated to even try. I have seen  
25 students put their heads on the desk during testing, or fill in bubbles in random patterns. As we attach ever  
26 higher stakes to these tests this behavior can have very harsh consequences for the schools and individual  
27 teachers as well.

28

29 **The trouble with this approach is that it intensifies the damage our obsession with testing is doing.**

30 It essentially "brands" students according to their academic performance on this one set of tests, and then  
31 rewards or humiliates them accordingly. Test performance has become literally the basis on which these  
32 students are identified. This means the majority of students at this school belong to a subclass, and they  
33 are being trained to think of themselves as unworthy of the good things in life due to their inferior  
34 performance. Of course, school leaders are hoping this will encourage everyone to try harder, but for  
35 many students, this is not a viable strategy. The English language learners, the learning disabled, these  
36 students struggle to succeed. Even First Lady Michelle Obama has **described herself** as being "never a  
37 great standardized test taker." Defining the worth of students based on standardized test scores is not  
38 likely to result in many magical turnarounds.

39

40 The quality of a student's work should not be reduced to a few test scores. Learning should be so much  
41 richer and more complex than these scores can ever indicate. And all of our students should be treated  
42 with equal respect, and not discriminated against based on their test scores. Test scores are not useless,  
43 but making them central to the mission of a school, and even worse, central to the identity of individual  
44 students, is a big mistake. Some parents are responding to the testing craze by going so far as to **opt out**  
45 of standardized tests altogether. Programs such as this one make that an understandable choice.