

# **The Academic Literacy and Skills Test Practice Exams Spring, 2014\***

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**\*NYSCTE has not released previously administered ALST exams. The two practice exams within were modeled on a practice exam within a study guide released by NYSTCE. We cannot predict the degree to which these practice exams will correspond to the actual ALST.**

## ALST Practice Test 1

### Sample Constructed-Response Items Competency 0002 Writing to Sources

#### *Passage A*

Charter schools would be a drain on funding  
*By Freedom Johnson*

I've been a teacher in Washington public schools for the last 13 years. I'm also a proud member of the Washington State PTA and the Washington Education Association. My daughter is going to be a high school sophomore when school starts in September.

Speaking as a mom, a public school teacher and a Washington taxpayer, I ask you to join me in voting NO on Initiative 1240, the charter school initiative.

As a mom, I'm concerned that I-1240 will undermine the recent Supreme Court order to increase school funding so all students can succeed. The court case is called the McCleary decision. According to the state Constitution, amply funding basic K-12 education is the state's paramount duty.

As a teacher, I'm concerned that, after years of budget cuts, I-1240 will drain millions of dollars from existing classrooms. As a taxpayer, I'm concerned because I-1240 creates an expensive new system of privately operated – but publicly funded – charter schools in Washington.

Along with thousands of other teachers, classified school employees, community members and parents, I urge you to vote *no* on I-1240.

There are many good reasons to oppose the charter school initiative, I-1240:

Charter schools will drain millions of dollars from existing public schools. At a time when school funding has already been cut dramatically, our children cannot afford this initiative.

Charter schools will make it harder to do what the state Supreme Court has ordered -- provide adequate funding for basic public education so all students have the chance to succeed.

Charter schools will serve only a tiny fraction of our student population. We need to make sure that all kids get a quality public education.

Charter schools are an unproven, risky gamble. Research conducted by Stanford University and others shows that, overall, charter schools do not perform better than public schools, and nearly 40 percent of them do worse.

Charter schools undermine local control. This initiative lets out-of-state charter school operators make the rules. That means less accountability to Washington taxpayers.

These are just a few of the reasons why dozens of groups oppose I-1240, including:

- The Washington State PTA
- The SEIU State Council
- The regional NAACP
- El Centro de la Raza
- The League of Women Voters

While the small group of wealthy people funding the I-1240 campaign has good intentions, there is no guarantee that kids who are struggling will have access to charter schools. Under this initiative, charter school enrollment will be determined by a lottery.

Instead of siphoning scarce school funding into new charter schools, we have an obligation to ensure ALL of our state's children have the opportunity to get a great public education. That means fully funding our existing schools. Instead, I-1240 diverts taxpayer money into unaccountable, unproven charter schools that would serve only some of our states' students.

Washington voters have already rejected charter schools three times. I-1240 is a discredited idea, and it's time to move on. Our state's children can't afford I-1240. Please join teachers, classified school employees, community members and parents: Vote *no* on I-1240.

*Freedom Johnson is a Renton teacher and a member of the Washington Education Association, which represents teachers and education support professionals across the state.*

<http://www.heraldnet.com/article/20120826/OPINION03/708269979>: retrieved on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014

### ***Passage B***

#### **Charter schools would give kids more options**

*By Mary Lou Evans*

When it comes to educating our children, most Washington parents agree that more options are a good thing. That's why it's surprising that Washington is not already one of the 41 states that allows parents to choose whether our children can attend a public charter school. It's especially odd given the high premium our state puts on education and innovation.

Voting "yes" on I-1240 will finally allow Washington parents and students this option. Research has shown that in states with strong public charter school laws, like I-1240, charter schools have achieved outstanding results in helping students succeed, especially those who are at-risk or struggling in traditional school settings.

These schools will be subject to strict oversight and public accountability, overseen by a local school board or a newly created charter school commission. Public charter schools authorized under 1240 will be subject to annual performance reviews and an evaluation at the end of five years to determine whether additional public charter schools should be allowed.

Charter schools are public schools, plain and simple. The key difference is that public charter schools are independently managed and operated by approved nonprofit organizations and are free from certain regulations so they have more flexibility in making decisions about curriculum, budgets, and the hiring and firing of teachers and staff. This flexibility is what allows these public schools to create the best learning environment to meet the needs of individual students.

Public charter schools are free and open to all students -- just like traditional public schools. They also receive funding based on student enrollment -- just like traditional public schools. Just like under current state law, the money follows the kids and stays within the public school system.

In addition, charter schools must meet the same academic standards as traditional public schools, and their teachers must meet the same certification requirements as teachers in other public schools.

I-1240 was written to include strict accountability standards and high performance requirements and is based on successes in other states with strong public charter school laws. Research from Stanford University and elsewhere shows that the states with the best laws are getting the best results. And 1240 brings the best of what has worked in other states to Washington.

I-1240 also has strong language regarding parent and local community involvement. I-1240 requires parent representation on the newly created state charter school commission – and requires that public charter schools demonstrate both community need as well as parent and community support before a charter school can be approved.

As a parent, I want more options and more opportunities for local parent involvement in my child's education, and I-1240 offers this.

Like other states, Washington has had difficulty in helping our struggling students succeed in school. While our traditional public schools work well for many students, there are still thousands of students in Washington who drop out of school every year. Still others who do graduate are not prepared enough to be successful in the workforce or in college.

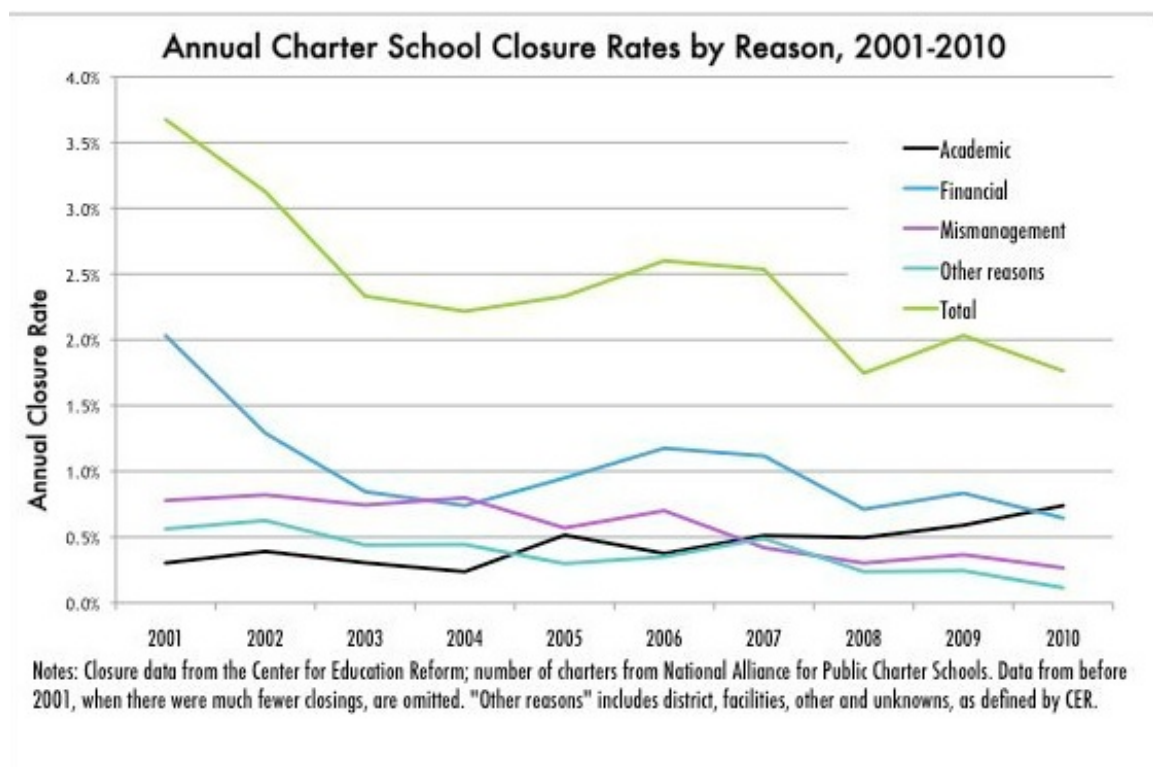
A *yes* vote on 1240 will provide another option within our public schools to help more students succeed. As parents, that is something we can all agree is a good thing.

I hope you will join with me and other parents across our state in voting *yes* on 1240 this November.

*Mary Lou Evans is a public school parent, past President of the Mill Creek Elementary PTA, and currently serves on the audit committee of both Jackson High School PTSA and Mill Creek Elementary PTA.*

<http://www.heraldnet.com/article/20120826/OPINION03/708269979>; retrieved on April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014

### Graphic



### Assignment 1: Use Passages A and B to respond to the following assignment.

In a response of approximately 100–200 words, identify which author presents a more compelling argument. Your response must:

- outline the specific claims made in each passage;
- evaluate the validity, relevance, and sufficiency of evidence used to support each claim; and
- include examples from both passages to support your evaluation.

Your response should be written for an audience of educated adults. With the exception of appropriately identified quotations and paraphrases from the sources provided, your writing must be your own. The final version of your response should conform to the conventions of edited American English.

**Assignment 2: Use Passage B and the Graphic to respond to the following assignment.**

In a response of approximately 100–200 words, explain how the information presented in the table and chart can be integrated with the author's central argument for passing charter school Initiative-1204 in Passage B. Your response must:

- explain how specific information presented in the chart either supports or counters the author's claims, reasoning, and evidence with regard to charter school initiative 1240;
- and include examples from the passage and the pie charts to support your explanation.

Your response should be written for an audience of educated adults. With the exception of appropriately identified quotations and paraphrases from the sources provided, your writing must be your own. The final version of your response should conform to the conventions of edited American English.

**Assignment 3: Use Passages A and B and the Graphic to respond to the following assignment.**

How should Washington citizens vote on Charter School Initiative 1240?

In an essay in your own words of approximately 400–600 words, present a fully developed argument that introduces and supports a claim assessing the benefits and risks of Charter School Initiative 1240. Your argument must:

- include a knowledgeable claim that demonstrates an understanding of the topic;
- use valid reasoning that draws on and extends the arguments in the sources provided;
- support your claim with relevant and sufficient evidence from all three sources; and
- anticipate and address at least one counterclaim.

Your essay should be written for an audience of educated adults. You must maintain an appropriate style and tone and use clear and precise language throughout. With the exception of appropriately identified quotations and paraphrases from the sources provided, your writing must be your own. The final version of your essay should conform to the conventions of edited American English.

## ALST Practice Test 2

### Sample Constructed-Response Items Competency 0002 Writing to Sources

#### Passage A

##### Low Prince, Managing Partner, Vintage Vinyl

I co-own and am the CEO of a company called Vintage Vinyl, in St. Louis, Missouri. My partner Tom Ray and I started with 300 record albums and a \$20 booth at the local Farmers Market. You could say our lives are a tribute to the American dream. We have grown into a multi-million-dollar business with 23 employees. We stage 150 in-store concerts a year in our 7,500-square-foot store with 40,000 compact discs, a similar number of records, and thousands of DVDs.

From day one, we have built this business on wages above the minimum. For this small, extra investment, I get loyal, long-term employees who are devoted to my company — employees whose ongoing relationships with my customers have built my business.

Back in 1979, when we started our company, the minimum wage was \$2.90. That would be \$9.20 in today's dollars. Even back then, it had eroded from the 1968 level, which would be \$10.59 in today's dollars. We never would have believed that 34 years later the buying power of minimum wage workers would actually be lower. That's terrible for small business, terrible for our economy, and terrible for our country.

If we had indexed the minimum wage to inflation back then, we wouldn't have this problem now. If we had indexed back then, my business would have benefited from the buying power of my customers being steady and predictable for the last 34 years.

We've outlasted a 20-store local chain and dozens of national chains. Most of those stores paid their employees minimum wage. My creative, loyal, dedicated, and better paid employees won this life or death struggle for us. Higher wages made us more competitive. While my competition dealt with the costly results of constant employee turnover, constant training costs, and the unsatisfied customers that turnover breeds, my employees added value to my business.

Indexing the minimum wage would make it easier for businesses to predict and plan for labor costs. The crucial part of my job as CEO is prediction. I must imagine the possible futures for my company and make sure my employees are financially and logistically prepared for them. Part of that is predicting costs. My rent, utilities, supplies, and health care costs rise constantly, sometimes unpredictably. Indexing would especially help businesses that pay minimum wage, as they would know when and how much to plan for.

My bookkeeper and I have already begun discussions in anticipation of your actions.

Indexing minimizes the disruption of rising labor costs in minimum wage businesses because raises are gradual. The minimum wage has been indexed in Missouri since 2007. In that time, indexing has tacked on 85 cents. That averages out to about 11 and one-half cents a year. If a business can't plan for or absorb that tiny cost increase, it's already dead in the water and is not going to survive even the slightest competition.

But most importantly, indexing makes the buying power of my customers more consistent and predictable. Small business owners know that higher minimum wages put spendable dollars into the hands of our customers. Minimum wage earners, who live from paycheck to paycheck, spend increases right away.

Putting a couple of hundred dollars more a month in their pockets would be a boon to business and a boon to the economy. These dollars go directly to the local grocery store, daycare, or pharmacy. It increases business and creates jobs.

Low Prince. *Congressional Digest*. May 2013, Vol. 92. Issue 5, p22.

## ***Passage B***

### **Connecticut Restaurant Association (CRA) David Rutigliano, Partner, SBC Restaurant Group**

I have two business partners, and we were all born and raised in Connecticut. We all got married and started families in Connecticut, and Connecticut is where we decided to start our business. We want our State and our country to succeed and prosper. However, we don't believe the Fair Minimum Wage Act of 2013 (S. 460) is the right avenue to achieve that prosperity.

This proposal seeks to increase the Federal minimum wage from \$7.25 per hour to \$10.10 per hour. That equates to a 39.3 percent minimum wage increase. In addition, it seeks to increase the cash wage for tipped employees from \$2.13 per hour to \$7.07 per hour, a 232 percent increase. These numbers are, simply put, staggering. At a time when many businesses are struggling to keep their doors open and in some cases employers are foregoing their own paychecks to avoid laying off employees, mandating wage increases will only hurt those employees which this proposal seeks to help.

In my home state of Connecticut, where we already have the fourth highest minimum wage at \$8.25 and one of the highest tipped wages at \$5.69, there is currently a proposal in the State legislature which seeks to increase the minimum wage to \$9.75 and the tipped wage to \$6.73. That, along with the recently enacted mandatory paid sick leave law, is making an already difficult situation even worse. Add to that the Affordable Care Act, and I ask anyone here to explain how those of us in the restaurant industry, which is labor-heavy and runs on extremely low profit margins, will survive, let alone prosper, should these proposals become law.

To be specific: In Connecticut, this bill would add roughly \$2,800 per year to the cost of a full-time tipped employee. In other States, it would add as much as \$10,000 to the annual cost of that employee. In an industry that just earns roughly \$2,600 in profit for each employee, an increase of this magnitude just isn't feasible.

The question of whether employers can bear the costs of increased minimum wages should be discussed on the merits, not on scare tactics or appeals to emotion. If an additional mandate means that employers like me will be forced to scale back, then employees could actually be worse off after it passes.

This is what the academic research suggests. Economists from the University of California-Irvine and the Federal Reserve Board published the results of a comprehensive review of all research conducted over the last 20 years on the effects increases to the minimum wage had on employment rates. They found that 85 percent of all credible studies came to the same conclusion: Increases in the minimum wage are almost always followed by a reduction in the number of jobs — particularly entry-level jobs. Simply put, increasing the cost of labor means employers are even less likely to hire — especially in a down economy.

A mandated increase in server wages only limits the amount of money left over for wage increases for other employees, like those working in the kitchen. The unemployment rate amongst our young people hovers around the 25 percent range. An increase in the minimum wage will only increase that number. The minimum wage is meant to be a learning wage. It is meant to give people the opportunity to gain experience and job training. When government increases the cost of labor, employers typically respond by reducing the number of entry-level, low-skilled workers they hire.

David Rutigliano. *Congressional Digest*. May 2013, Vol. 92. Issue 5, p29.

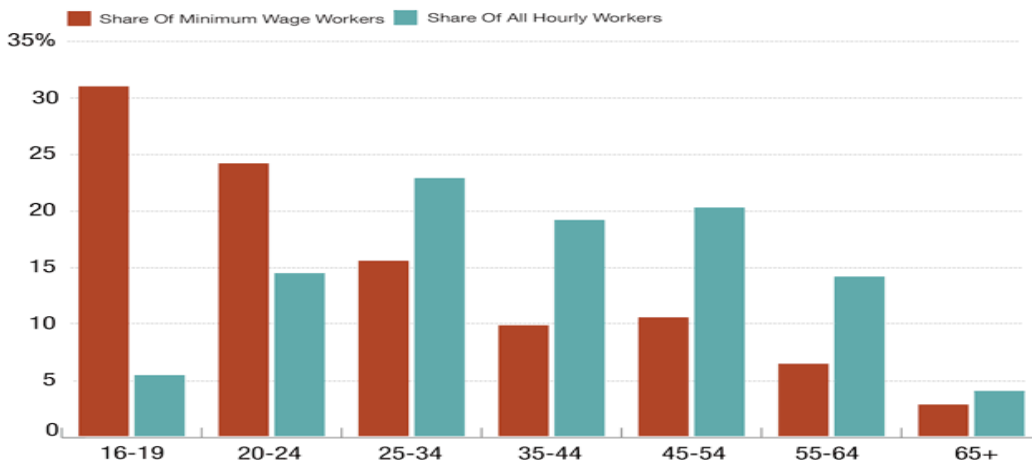
Graphics

**Table 1.**

**Estimated Effects on Employment, Income, and Poverty of an Increase in the Federal Minimum Wage, Second Half of 2016**

|  | <b>\$10.10 Option<sup>a</sup></b>               |
|--|---|
| Change in Employment   |   |
| Central estimate <sup>c</sup>  | -500,000 workers                                |
| Likely range <sup>d</sup>  | Very slight decrease to<br>-1.0 million workers |
| Number of Workers With Hourly Wages Less Than the Proposed Minimum Whose Earnings Would Increase in an Average Week <sup>e</sup> | 16.5 million                                    |
| Change in Real Income (2013 dollars, annualized) <sup>f</sup>  |   |
| Families whose income is below the poverty threshold   | \$5 billion                                     |
| Families whose income is between one and three times the poverty threshold   | \$12 billion                                    |
| Families whose income is between three and six times the poverty threshold   | \$2 billion                                     |
| Families whose income is six times the poverty threshold or more   | -\$17 billion                                   |
| Change in the Number of People Below the Poverty Threshold <sup>g</sup>  | -900,000  |

**Are Mostly Young ...  
Distribution Of Workers By Age, 2012**



Source: Bureau of Labor Statistics

**Assignment 1: Use Passages A and B to respond to the following assignment.**

In a response of approximately 100–200 words, identify which author presents a more compelling argument. Your response must:

- outline the specific claims made in each passage;
- evaluate the validity, relevance, and sufficiency of evidence used to support each claim; and
- include examples from both passages to support your evaluation.

Your response should be written for an audience of educated adults. With the exception of appropriately identified quotations and paraphrases from the sources provided, your writing must be your own. The final version of your response should conform to the conventions of edited American English.



**Assignment 2: Use Passage B and either or both of the graphics to respond to the following assignment.**

In a response of approximately 100–200 words, explain how the information presented in the table and/or chart can be integrated with the author's central argument against the Fair Minimum Wage Act in Passage B. Your response must:

- explain how specific information presented in the graphics either supports or counters the author's claims, reasoning, and evidence with regard to the conversion of corn to ethanol;
- and include examples from the passage and the graphics to support your explanation.

Your response should be written for an audience of educated adults. With the exception of appropriately identified quotations and paraphrases from the sources provided, your writing must be your own. The final version of your response should conform to the conventions of edited American English.

**Assignment 3: Use Passages A and B and the Graphic to respond to the following assignment.**

Should the minimum wage be raised from \$7.25 per hour to \$10.10 per hour as proposed in the Fair Minimum Wage Act?

In an essay in your own words of approximately 400–600 words, present a fully developed argument that introduces and supports a claim assessing the benefits and risks of raising the minimum wage to \$10.10 per hour. Your argument must:

- include a knowledgeable claim that demonstrates an understanding of the topic;
- use valid reasoning that draws on and extends the arguments in the sources provided;
- support your claim with relevant and sufficient evidence from all three sources; and
- anticipate and address at least one counterclaim.

Your essay should be written for an audience of educated adults. You must maintain an appropriate style and tone and use clear and precise language throughout. With the exception of appropriately identified quotations and paraphrases from the sources provided, your writing must be your own. The final version of your essay should conform to the conventions of edited American English.

## ALST Practice Test 3

### Sample Constructed-Response Items Competency 0002 Writing to Sources

#### Passage A

##### Michael Tanner from “The American Welfare State: How We Spend Nearly \$1 Trillion Fighting Poverty—And Fail”

The American welfare state is much larger than commonly believed. The federal government alone currently funds and operates 126 different welfare or anti-poverty programs, spending more than \$668 billion per year. State and local governments provide additional funding for several of these programs and also operate a number of programs on their own, adding another \$284 billion per year. That means that, at all levels, government is spending more than \$952 billion per year, just short of the trillion dollar mark.

Yet for all this spending, we have made remarkably little progress in reducing poverty. Indeed, poverty rates have risen in recent years even as spending on anti-poverty programs has increased. All of this suggests that the answer to poverty lies not in the expansion of the welfare state, but in building the habits and creating the conditions that lead to prosperity.

It would make sense therefore to shift our anti-poverty efforts from government programs that simply provide money or goods and services to those who are living in poverty to efforts to create the conditions and incentives that will make it easier for people to escape poverty. Poverty, after all, is the natural condition of man. Indeed, throughout most of human history, man has existed in the most meager of conditions. Prosperity, on the other hand, is something that is created. And we know that the best way to create wealth is not through government action, but through the power of the free market.

That means that if we wish to fight poverty, we should end those government policies— high taxes and regulatory excess—that inhibit growth and job creation. We should protect capital investment and give people the opportunity to start new businesses. We should reform our failed government school system to encourage competition and choice. We should encourage the poor to save and invest.

We all seek a society where every American can reach his or her full potential, where as few people as possible live in poverty, and where no one must go without the basic necessities of life. More importantly we seek a society in which every person can live a fulfilled and actualized life. Shouldn't we judge the success of our efforts to end poverty not by how much charity we provide to the poor but by how few people need such charity?

By that measure, our current \$1 trillion War on Poverty is a failure.

Tanner, Michael. “The American Welfare State: How We Spend Nearly \$1 Trillion Fighting Poverty—And Fail.” *Policy Analysis*. April 2012. No. 694.

#### Passage B

##### Olga Kahzan from “The Case for Unconditional Handouts to the Poor”

Morocco is one of the more developed countries in Africa, but only about half -- 56 percent -- of its population can read. Most schools there lack electricity, and many don't even have toilets. Most children living in the country's rural areas start primary school, but about 40 percent drop out before sixth grade. The rudimentary education system makes its mark in the country's test scores: It's ranked 59 out of 69 countries in math and 64 out of 70 on science.

To nudge families to keep their children in school, researchers recently experimented with giving parents in the country's poorest districts small grants of between \$8 and \$10 per child each month. Some of them

were told they'd only get paid if their child attended school regularly, but the others were simply handed money, told nothing, and sent on their way.

Surprisingly, the researchers found that giving out money without any preconditions was more effective than asking families to do something in exchange for their bounty. "To the extent that conditionality had any impact, it was a negative one," they concluded.

A *New York Times* magazine story this week explores a similar theme: The rising trend of giving the poor cash transfers -- free money -- and hoping that it results in some positive action, like eating better or going to school or getting medical treatment. And despite our most pessimistic views of human nature, the *Times* found that in some cases, it actually works.

Mexico tried something similar on a large scale with its PROGRESA program in the late '90s, doling out handouts to millions of Mexican families. To their surprise, irresponsible parents didn't drink away the funds or fight over the best way to spend it. Instead, it pretty much just did what it was supposed to:

Researchers found that children in the cash program were more likely to stay in school, families were less likely to get sick and people ate a more healthful diet. Recipients also didn't tend to blow the money on booze or cigarettes, and many even invested a chunk of what they received. Today, more than six million Mexican families get cash transfers.

The difference between PROGRESA and one version of the program tested in Morocco is that the Mexican strategy came with conditions -- parents had to send their kids to school and for regular check-ups. The Morocco program, meanwhile, didn't require them to do anything.

While both versions of the Morocco program -- conditional and unconditional -- helped boost school enrollment figures, the unconditional grants were even more effective at getting kids enrolled and keeping them from dropping out than the kind that came with requirements. It was also cheaper, since administrators didn't need to keep track of students' attendance.

The program worked largely because it mitigated the families' financial difficulties. The parents had more money, so the children could go learn algebra instead of selling trinkets by the roadside.

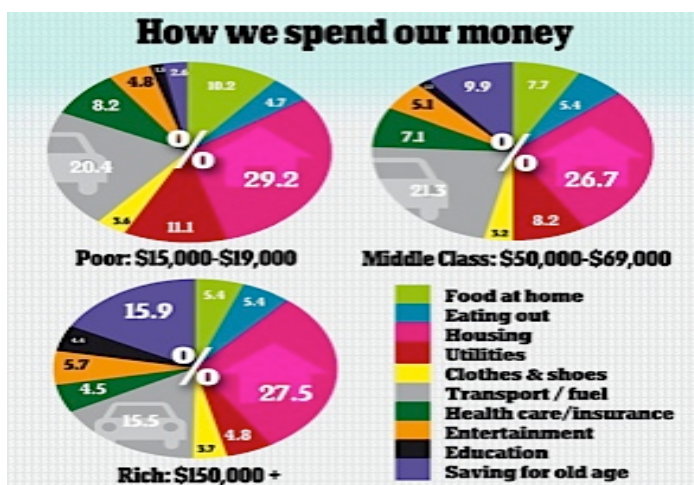
"People know what they need," writes the *Times*' Jason Goldstein. "And if they have money, they can buy it."

Kahzan, Olga. "The Case for Unconditional Handouts to the Poor." *The Atlantic*. August 2013.

<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2013/08/the-case-for-unconditional-handouts-to-the-poor/278770/>. Retrieved April 13<sup>th</sup>, 2014

### Graph

From "Spending America: How Poor Middle Class Rich Divided Incomes"



Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk>

**Assignment 1: Use Passages A & B to respond to the following assignment.**

In a response of approximately 100-200 words, identify which author presents a more compelling argument. Your response must:

- Outline the specific claims made in each passage;
- Evaluate the validity, relevance, and sufficiency of evidence used to support each claim; and
- Include examples from both passages to support your evaluation

Your response should be written for an audience of educated adults. With the exception of appropriately identified quotations and paraphrases from the sources provided, your writing must be your own. The final version should conform to the conventions of edited American English.

**Assignment 2: Use Passage B and the Graphic to respond to the following assignment.**

In a response of approximately 100-200 words, explain how the information presented in the pie charts can be integrated with the author's central argument concerning welfare policy. Your response must:

- Explain how specific information presented in the pie charts either supports or counters the author's claims, reasoning, and evidence with regard to welfare policy; and
- Include examples from the passage and the pie charts to support your explanation.

Your response should be written for an audience of educated adults. With the exception of appropriately identified quotations and paraphrases from the sources provided, your writing must be your own. The final version should conform to the conventions of edited American English.

**Assignment 3: Use Passages A and B to respond to the following assignment.**

Should the U.S. government continue to fund its \$1 Trillion welfare program, and if so, what conditions, if any should be placed on those receiving government aid?

In an essay in your own words of approximately 400–600 words, present a fully developed argument that introduces and supports a claim that assesses the benefits and limitations of restricting access to aid based on certain conditions.

- Include a knowledgeable claim that demonstrates an understanding of the topic;
- Use valid reasoning that draws on and extends the arguments in the sources provided;
- Support your claim with relevant and sufficient evidence from all three sources; and
- Anticipate and address at least one counterclaim.

Your essay should be written for an audience of educated adults. You must maintain an appropriate style and tone and use clear and precise language throughout. With the exception of appropriately identified quotations and paraphrases from the sources provided, your writing must be your own. The final version should conform to the conventions of edited American English.