

Standardized ‘high-stakes’ tests are not accurate or valid assessments

Teaching/Testing Mismatch

Even on a standards-based assessment, such as the California Standards Test (CST) there is still teaching/testing mismatch. The amount of information in the standards is vast. Even if all you do is teach to the standards, you can’t possibly teach or learn it all. Each profession drew up its standards as if it were the only one. You could spend all year on geography alone.

Tendency to throw out questions covering important content

In order to spread out the students’ test scores, questions that most students get right are removed from the test. This means that the questions which are based on the standards that are the most important, that most teachers spend the most time on will be the questions that most of the students will get right. Consequently, those questions will be removed from future tests. So, the most important topics that students will need to be proficient in will not be covered on the test.

There is no evidence that high stakes testing improves the quality of the school or your children’s education.

In fact, there is considerable evidence that high stakes testing degrades the curriculum and depresses standards. The small upward shifts the media and test advocates sometimes tout are misleading and from an educational point of view almost meaningless. So what is the educational meaning of 3-5% or even a 10% shift (up or down) which often translates to a shift of a mere handful of multiple choice test items?

Academic achievement and the achievement test scores are NOT one and the same

There is no relationship between a test score and actual academic performance. A standardized reading test score says virtually nothing about a person’s actual ability to read.

Standardized tests have little or no ‘predictive validity’ except to social class (\$10,000 =30 SAT points) and are of no diagnostic value for teachers and students.

Race gap in academic achievement and the gap in achievement test scores are NOT one and the same

Standardized testing technology rests on:

1. Racist 19th century “scientific” assumptions about human intelligence, capacities and achievements
2. Archaic early 20th century information processing technology.

Multiple choice, standardized test technology is dated and at a scientific and technological dead-end. The microprocessor makes possible school- site managed assessments that are context, situation, and person sensitive which were unimaginable when multiple choice tests were invented. Exploring these technologies is not in the interest of an industry heavily invested in standardized curriculum and multiple-choice test technology.

Sources

The Truth About Testing by James Popham
Progressive Educators Network Creating
International Liberation
Harold Berlak, Ph.D, Applied Research Center,
Oakland, CA

High stakes testing serves as a form of institutional racism

The racial and cultural bias is NOT primarily lodged in the content of test items.

What makes standardized tests racist is:

1. Disproportionate (ratio: approx. 30%→70+%) test failure rates for Persons of Color and English language learners as compared to white native English speakers.
2. The tests encourage retention which disproportionately effects African-Americans and Latinos. **Retention contributes to academic failure rather than to success in school.** A single grade retention increases the chances that a student will drop out by 50%. A second retention increases the risk by 90%.
3. Since there is no demonstrable connection between performance on a standardized test and a person’s actual academic achievement, to deny a person access to educational opportunities on the basis of test scores alone is to institutionalize racism.
4. The technology of standardized tests creates and inflates differences that have little or no educational significance. The actual ‘race gap’ in scores is about 10% (range of 8 -15% regardless of the test.) On a 50 item multiple choice test this represents a difference of 2_–4_ test items.

Source: *In Brief*, Harold Berlak

High stakes testing policies Why do they exist and continue to expand?

1. At home and at school, we are socialized and have come to accept the fiction that standardized multiple-choice tests tell the 'real' story.

2. The Business Roundtable has used the belief in the tests' ability to accurately measure achievement to engineer the second major transformation in the history of public school education. The purpose of high stakes testing is to legitimize a new tracking system (college and dropouts) that serves the New Economy's job market.

3. There are powerful corporate interests in the test publishing, servicing and test prep and packaged curriculum industry (E.g.: Harold McGraw of McGraw Hill, the nations largest text and test publisher)

(High stakes testing sold to the public as cheap is NOT cheap. Costs are in the multi-billions.)

4. The persistence of the myth that there are no alternative assessment policies and forms of testing.

How to fight it

Significant change is possible only when the historical forces are in alignment with grassroots coalitions. Specifically, teachers and parents need to establish working relationships with each other through deep and honest discussion.

California has 3 high-stakes tests

1. CST (California Standards Test)

The CSTs are 'criterion referenced' tests based on the California Content Standards. The proficiency level is arbitrarily decided by a state appointed panel. There is no effort to ground test cut off scores in individuals' actual proficiency in the subject.

2. CAT/6 (California Achievement Test 6th Ed.)

A group of norm-referenced tests given in the 3rd and 7th grades. A 'norm-referenced' test means that half of the test takers will always score above the 50th percentile and half will score below.

3. CAHSEE (California High School Exit Exam)

The test items are tied to a state's so called 'content standards.' Proficiency cut off scores are determined by approximately the same process used for the CST. HSEE will be a requirement for high school graduation in 2006.

Resources

National Center for Fair and Open Testing

www.fairtest.org

California Coalition for Authentic

Reform in Education

www.calcare.org

Susan Ohanian

www.susanohanian.org

Stephan Krashen

<http://www.sdkrashen.com>

What's

Wrong

with

High-Stakes

Tests

by

Teachers 4 Social Justice:

Community Action

Group

4 Authentic Assessment

Contact:

Dawn Mermer

415-824-1917

dawmermer@yahoo.com