

NATIONAL AT-RISK EDUCATION NETWORK

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“Everyone I know was shocked and demoralized by the Atlanta scandal. I don't believe that kind of thing can happen in a district that isn't corrupt from the top down, but I also believe it would never have happened were it not for high-stakes testing.”

–California Teacher

"Obviously no one understands highschool kids and how they think. Next year Tennessee will base 50% of its evaluation, merit pay, promotion and retention on these state tests. A teacher found out from his son who is in a local high school that the kids have already circulated a list of teachers who they will be "fire bombing" by deliberately messing up their tests in hopes of getting the teachers fired. The kids have found out it doesn't effect their grades so they have formed these "Fire Bomb Lists" to deliberately screw up the tests with the wrong answers to get the teachers fired. Any teacher who puts a lot of pressure on them will go on the list, no doubt. My guess is you are going to have a LOT of sweet-talking teachers this year!"

–Tennessee HS Teacher

CHEATING PROFESSIONALS

– A Proposal to Mentally Accept Cheating on High Stakes Testing –

Anthony Dallmann-Jones PhD, Director
National At-Risk Education Network

[In early July of 2011 the National At-Risk Education Network conducted a survey of a sampling of educators across the United States via an emailed questionnaire. The sample included administrators at various levels as well as teachers from K-12. After analyzing over 40 pages of responses, Dr. Anthony Dallmann-Jones, a research and testing graduate of Florida State University – with a PhD in educational psychology - and author of the book SHADOW CHILDREN ~ Understanding Education's #1 Problem, has analyzed the results and issued this monograph regarding, and quoting, some of the results.]

It's the BIGGEST DEAL, the ONLY deal. They give unending repetitious pre-tests (two sets of two hour BAT test almost back to back).....with no progress shown from prior year's results, causing kids to shut down. They demand monthly writing tests, making it impossible to actually teach the skills....also shutting the kids down on the on the whole process. They are the be all and end all of our jobs. We comply.

–Teacher, Texas.

Scores. That is the word, is it not? Scores. What's the score? You enter the room 20 minutes into a televised National Football League game and the first question you ask after, "Would you pass those BBQ potato chips?" is "What's the score?"

The concept of a score is necessary because the sport of football is about **winning**, and you know who won by keeping a thing called the score. The score is determined by things called *points* which are determined by touchdowns in football, runs in baseball, baskets in basketball, goals in soccer and so

on. Imagine if this fall they announced that no longer would there be any scorekeeping in football? No scoreboard needed—just playing for the fun of it. Who got the highest *score*? Don't know, don't care. No scoring; we're just satisfied by watching guys in gear getting healthy exercise and celebrating a well thrown pass or a run through eleven men without falling down. No one ever would cross the goal line. Because there is no goal line! The last line on the field at either end is the ten yard line—then just empty grass up to the wall of the stadium wherever that happens to be. How many people would continue watching football? How many multi-million dollar contracts would continue to exist? How much press coverage would occur in the sports column? Would there even *be* a sports column? And, 'What's the score?' or 'Who won?' would never be asked again. That's just football. Heck, let's just eliminate those pesky scores for all the sports – baseball, basketball, soccer, hockey, et al! Wonder how many team jerseys and ball caps would be sold? Sports MUST have a score. Why? Because it creates excitement! It creates a reason for men to risk tearing their knee ligaments apart and getting brain-rattling concussions and even the horror of seeing a friend dying on the field.* [The author has personally experienced this.] The *score*. It makes sense in sports.

The only focus is on the test. Learning is a distant second. The test is a HUGE deal. Curriculum is continually interrupted so students can take more practice tests. The students are numbed by all this and do not do a good job on the test due to all the pressure placed on them.

– Teacher/Department Head

Education is not a sport. School is not a *sport*. Academic learning is not a *sport*. Right? Why can you and I clearly understand that, but our own federal and state governments cannot? Tell me that we have not elected people so dense they cannot tell the difference between a sports score and an academic score. PLEASE tell me that our national security, health security, social security and border security, plus our country's economic security in the world, is not being directed by people who cannot tell an NFL game field with 22 players from a 4th grade class with 22 students. Please tell me that the country with the supposedly brightest scientists, and the first and only country to land people on the moon, cannot – in effect – comprehend the opening paragraph of almost every book on classroom testing stating that the purpose of testing students is to improve instruction. It is to help teachers AND students ascertain what had and had not been learned from the course content. Period. Our politicians – who now have way too much say about academic achievement – do not seem to comprehend the purpose of testing. They think that children competing against one another's schools for the highest average test score is a good thing!

In the world of American public education, we have now lowered ourselves to giving top accolades to schools who "beat" other schools in test score gains. And, it is important to see that this competition between schools has nothing to do with the curriculum or academic subject matter –nor does it help A SINGLE child improve his/her knowledge base. We have turned schools into a sporting event.

They make it obvious they want more private and charter schools and it is the families without means that will end up getting hurt. They use test scores to say the current system is broken when actually the measures we are using are inappropriate. –Principal

Wrong. Sometimes it is possible that some things are not defensible because they are, quite simply, wrong. Personally, I would give tests as a teacher to see if Jennifer knows how to properly use pronouns, not to see if my class can "beat" the other fifth grade teachers' classes. Competitive, high-stakes testing steals time away from real learning for Jennifer – AND legitimate testing that teaches Jennifer's teacher to teach better! Let's be specific. Just for a moment, let us get REAL and be SPECIFIC. No rhetoric about, "If we discover that Jennifer and her classmates are not doing well compared to Ms. Beasley's class then we know that Jennifer's teacher needs to be replaced so that some future Jennifers WILL know their pronouns!" How is that for an answer? Cowflop. First of all, those competitive tests? No

one will EVER look at the perhaps two or three items on the test that measure correct usage of pronouns (incidentally, two or three questions about pronouns are not enough to determine much anyway) and apply it back to Jennifer. Most teachers never see the tests again. How can the test results EVER help this or any other Jennifers? It won't. But it will, as you will see by the survey responses, steal precious time and instills fear and anxiety – both of which are counterproductive to REAL learning which is the precious commodity of our public schools.

Secondly, and this is VERY important: This test does not even come close to telling you how good Jennifer's teacher is as a teacher. Walk with me on this: Whatever your main job is, including parenthood, can you imagine that a single two digit score would evaluate your whole career for the last year? If you are a surgeon, which test is it that could accurately tell you or anyone else how good a surgeon you are? If you are a baseball player, could one snapshot of you at the plate in one game tell us how good a ballplayer you have been for the past year? High-stakes testing has become ridiculous. No, it is WRONG. Sometimes something is just WRONG. Sometimes something is wrong AND ridiculous! Can we, PLEASE, just admit we are WRONG in assuming that a single test score can measure anything accurately? Until we do, we will keep doing it over and over at a millions upon millions price tag not only for naught, but wasting funds that are desperately needed for REAL learning. Even worse, lately, soaring test scores are more likely to raise eyebrows than to elicit praise. As stories of cheating continue coming to light, they reveal an uncomfortable possibility that perhaps we should be suspicious rather than celebratory of high scores. We are now discovering that when student achievement suddenly rises dramatically, investigation must come before celebration.

*Yes. The pressure to make an annual learning gain is extreme with many students who really don't see the significance of their outcome on the teacher, or, they **do** see the significance and want to "burn" their teacher and/or school [by deliberately making false responses].*

– Louisiana Administrator

Cheating? It's more like rebellion to me and my colleagues. This has gotten WAY out of hand to the point that it serves them right if we cheat! They don't REALLY care about our kids or us. They aren't listening to educators...what do we know? Let them come down here and put in a year in the classroom and see how valid they think a test would be to measure your years work with these kids. So cheating doesn't seem so much as cheating as telling them to stick it. It feels like tit for tat!

–Telephone Conversation with Wisconsin educator

The Cheating Scandal That Barely Surprises

A few weeks ago, on July 6, the story* that had been developing along with an investigation by the state broke into the news – again (this was not the first time there had been a cheating scandal inside Atlanta Public Schools) – only this time, all the gloves were pulled off and the nastiness of the cheating took on the face of a sickening and pervasive SYSTEM of cheating. The cheating – composed of deceit, furtive and consistent efforts to change scores, and threats of reprisal to those who refused to cheat or became “informants.” This caused one teacher to say, “APS is run like the mob,” informing investigators that she cheated because she feared retaliation if she didn't. (Actual examples below). The investigative report names 178 educators, including 38 principals, as participants in cheating. More than 80 confessed. The investigators said they confirmed cheating in 44 of 56 schools they examined – almost 80%!

Top school officials, including then-Superintendent Beverly Hall, reportedly knew about the cheating, and even tried to cover up evidence. Efforts to falsify scores were highly organized and coordinated. At one school, teachers held weekend “changing parties” off campus to turn wrong answers into right ones. In some cases, children who couldn't even read not only passed the test, but scored at the highest level, making them ineligible to receive the extra academic help they needed, this

being one of those spinoff issues few discuss. Investigators said “a culture of fear and a conspiracy of silence” in Atlanta schools fed the misconduct.

Examples of coercion: In Georgia, teachers complained to investigators that some students arrived at middle school reading at a first-grade level. But, they said, principals insisted those students had to pass their standardized tests. Teachers were either ordered to cheat or pressured by administrators until they felt they had no choice, authorities said. One principal forced a teacher to crawl under a desk during a faculty meeting, publicly shaming her because her test scores were low. Another principal told teachers that “WalMart is hiring” and “the door swings both ways,” the report said. Another principal told a teacher on her first day that the school did whatever was necessary to meet testing benchmarks, even if that meant “breaking the rules.”

A Georgia teacher bravely speaks out

Teachers from the investigation contacted by The Associated Press did not return calls or declined to comment, so NAREN began its own investigative work. We interviewed a teacher in the Georgia system who, after being assured of confidentiality said, and I quote: “I have had students transfer into my classes from Atlanta Public Schools tell me that they have had teachers give them the answers for CRCT tests. I also know an adult graduate of an Atlanta Public school who told me that this was routine when she was in school. The corruption is widespread. I think the problem is needing to meet impossible mandates. Trying to standardize children and teachers is an impossible and silly task. Teachers and administrators are feeling the pressure to meet education mandates that do not address how their students learn, or what the children need to [learn in order to] succeed in life. Pretending that everyone started out on the same playing field with the same opportunities to develop the necessary cognitive skills to attend and learn is not an effective way to achieve high standards. As Race to the Top is being implemented with pay for performance rules it will get even worse. The students must pass these tests in order for the school to survive. Cheating is inevitable. It is clear to me that gaming the system by all parties involved will be the only way to survive.”

[End quote]

A litany of visible cases of high-stakes cheating and impropriety

Other scandals involving cheating by school teachers and administrators of note are:

- In 2006, the Texas Education Agency (TEA) hired a security company to analyze state test results for signs of cheating and it was revealed that 699 schools had suspicious scores.
- It was announced on June 15, 2011, that fourteen school districts across Florida, according to their Department of Education, are being investigated as to whether or not cheating went on during this year’s high stakes testing.
- On March 1st of this year, the Los Angeles School Board voted to close six “high-scoring” charter schools after they discovered that the executive director of those schools was handing out advance copies of the state tests to his principals with orders to “prepare their students.” Six hundred tests from 2nd through 5th grades were invalidated in 2010. The clever response from the board was to fire the director and shut down the schools leaving hundreds of students to fend for themselves in finding another school to attend.
- In 2009, a data security firm analyzed Pennsylvania’s state test scores for patterns indicative of possible tampering. Their report identified 60 schools across the state that received at least three suspicious red flags in a single grade. Statistical irregularities included unusual erasure patterns and improbable jumps in student performance levels. Although the analysis was prepared for the Pennsylvania Department of Education (PDE), the state ignored the report for two years until an independent newspaper obtained a copy of the report and published its

findings earlier this month. A few days later – on July 13, 2011, the PDE announced that it will order 40 districts and nine charter operators across the state to investigate possible cheating at 90 different schools. Although information seemed to be ignored before, the investigation will report its findings by August 13th according to official findings.

- In our nation's capitol, Washington D.C., between 2008 and 2010, under the chancellorship of Michele Rhee, more than 100 schools demonstrated unusually high rates of erasures where incorrect answers were changed to correct ones. D.C. Schools Chancellor Kaya Henderson, who succeeded Rhee after her resignation, has requested a follow-up inquiry, which has recently been joined by federal officials from the U.S. Department of Education. When the story was finally published in March 2011, the District hired a test security firm to investigate. Analysts found "testing irregularities" at three different schools and students' test results were invalidated for students in several classrooms; at least two teachers were dismissed – numbers were uncertain and it possibly could have been more than two dismissed for this reason.

Cheating not widespread, states Secretary Duncan

When the Atlanta story broke two weeks ago, the latest scandal chronologically in the string listed here, Secretary of Education Arne Duncan says the cheating is not widespread. We have no idea how he knows that.

- This was after the June 23, 2011, story that broke in Baltimore of cheating in two schools, Ft. Worthington Elementary and Abbottston Elementary. Both had been verified as cheating during the 2009-2010 school year. Abbottston's "cheating year" was the same year in which the school was honored for academic achievement with a visit from U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan.
- Returning to Texas, on Jul 14, 2011 the Houston Independent School District uncovered evidence that teachers at two elementary schools helped students cheat on state exams. In the most serious cases, students from Lockhart and Cornelius said teachers alerted them to wrong answers on high-stakes exams, and an analysis of test booklets from Cornelius showed suspicious erasures changing wrong responses to right ones.
- On July 20, 2011, 34 N.J. schools were to be investigated for possible cheating after the state discovered test score irregularities. The state identified nine schools with high school-wide averages and 25 district and charter schools with high levels of erasures changed to right answers in one or more grades, a state report shows.
- July 28, 2011: Signs of cheating found on tests in Waterbury , CT just made the news in time to be included in this report. An investigation into suspiciously high test scores at one of Waterbury's elementary schools has turned up indications of cheating, prompting the state to intensify its involvement in a probe launched last week, according to a local official close to the investigation. Speaking on the condition of anonymity, the local official said the state's preliminary review turned up significant numbers of erasures in Hopeville Elementary School student booklets for the Connecticut Mastery Test taken in March.

"How many wake-up calls have they had?" Robert Schaeffer, of the anti-testing National Center for Fair & Open Testing, asked of Houston Independent School District. "When people's careers, income and self-images depend on boosting test scores, some will find ways to boost scores by any means necessary."

Federal officials claim there is no relationship between high-stakes testing and cheating. I think even Jennifer would know better than that. If you choose not to ask Jennifer and view the research begin with Campbell's Law which told us over 35 years ago that the higher the stakes the more cheating and gaming of the system is nearly a guaranteed result – practically a law of physics.

Testing does not define who we are but we have to be able to show parents and the community the wonderful things we are doing. It is too much, too often, they take too much time. We aren't testing we are practicing with similar assessments. In the words of Dudley Flood, "Hogs don't get fat because you weigh them." – Wisconsin Principal

HIGH-STAKES TESTING AND CHEATING

National At-Risk Education Network Survey Results (administered in July, 2011)

Listed below are samples of responses to a National At-Risk Education Network given in early July of 2011. The respondents are a sample of NAREN's mailing list of approximately 39,000 educators. Represented are over 30 teachers at all levels, as well as central office (superintendents and assistant superintendents of curriculum and instruction) and building administrators (principals, assistant principals and guidance counselors). In the Appendix (or link) are ALL of the unadulterated survey responses stated as written. Without political spin or news media filtering, they are there as a representative sample of what public school teachers AND administrators across the United States are saying about high-stakes testing and cheating and a few other things. We also wanted to know what they see happening to our central concern – at-risk youth – and how this testing is impacting them.

First, to head each response section, will be the question, then some selected excerpts that are representative. The full set of responses is 30 pages long and is located in their entirety in the Appendix of this monograph. Identities have been protected.

Q1) How is your district/school handling the "annual standardized test" agenda? Is it a BIG DEAL - or not - in your area? How does your district prepare for the testing? What message(s) do you get from the administration, etc. about the tests? How do you and your colleagues generally regard the testing?

– Retired Teacher

"The tests take up too much time. Our preparation is disorganized and somewhat ineffective. Nobody likes the tests or supports them in our district."

– Teacher

Well, the state testing appears to be laughably bad, if the sample questions sent home with my second grader are any indicator. The questions I've seen, which we're told are representative (but I don't know if that means they're from previous tests since apparently every aspect of the testing is a state secret) have been riddled with grammar errors, mistakes in the allegedly "correct" answers, and just badly written questions. [My husband and I] both have Ph.D.'s in literature, and if we can't figure out what a multiple choice question on the 3rd grade reading test is trying to elicit, I doubt if most 3rd graders could. Half of them sound like they were written by high school dropouts and the other half by people doing drugs.

– HS Teacher

In Tennessee, everything is shifting to solely data-driven, performance standards where test data dictates everything, i.e., student performance, teacher performance, school performance, etc. Since testing dictates everything (annual yearly progress, graduation rates, etc.) administration sweats bullets. My colleagues take it very seriously especially beginning the 2011-2012 school year because now since the tenure law has been emasculated teacher's jobs are now dependent on school performance and now in Tennessee, teachers (those who used to be tenured can now be dismissed if they do not reach state mandated test/data benchmarks which are based solely on student performance.

– HS Special Ed Teacher

It's not pleasant. Students tend to see district/state-wide testing as a pain or a joke. ...the reality is that it cuts into instruction time, it doesn't necessarily match with what course material students have covered, and it creates issues with AYP when my special ed. students struggle through, even with accommodations.

–Teacher

It is a very, very big deal. A huge amount of money, parental support, state support, federal support depends of this. ...the pressure is building. We have thrown enormous amounts of school resources (and a lot of community support) at that bottom quartile: one-on-one mentoring, after-school tutoring, everyone with a free section teaching remedial reading, etc. I haven't ever heard is one breath or even suggestion of scandal or cheating. In fact, I wouldn't believe it if I did. The principal and his APs are people of tremendous integrity. They may feel desperation (I'm sure they do, in fact), but they would never, ever stoop to that. Everyone I know was shocked and demoralized by the Atlanta scandal. I don't believe that kind of thing can happen in a district that isn't corrupt from the top down, but I also believe it would never have happened (other corruptions no doubt would have) were it not for high-stakes testing.

– Assistant Principal – Middle School

We prepare year round for the tests. We have added computers to from E2T2 monies to enable us to take the EOC's. The testing is a HUGE deal. My job as Principal was determined by our success on standardized tests and school grades. I am being replaced because of a dip in FCAT scores.

– HS Special Ed Teacher

OGT - Ohio is getting out of this business and looking to the ACT. I administer the ACT on four occasions during the school year. ACT testing has not been a big deal, only to college bound students, but with Ohio looking at ACT for graduation I have some real fears.

– Administrator (Private, non-profit, special education school)

We are approved by the DOE, so we must impose standardized tests which are required for students to pass in order to receive HS diploma. It is a big deal for our struggling students, who are candidates to drop-out once they figure out that they have no chance of getting a diploma.

– Administrator

This is a huge deal. Administrators are currently evaluated based upon their relative success in keeping their scores high enough to meet the targets for Adequate Yearly Progress. Our department chairmen take pride in their scores and try to instill that pride in teachers. Most teachers are equally invested in ensuring student success on the state exams.

–Teacher

Last year we bribed the middle schoolers with iPad shuffles; if they raised their score a certain amount their names went in to a drawing - very effective! Terrified of "the list". We test three times a year, twice on the computer, once with bubble ITBS. I consider it a waste of time, no new information, just cynicism from students and faculty.

– Unknown

Our school board has painted a picture of our "school failure" based on the results of one standardized test taken by kids in the fall of the Junior year even though many other indicators suggest school success! We have had to resort to "bribing" kids to take the test seriously by giving rewards like parking spaces and gift certificates... The test has a place but not as the single determining factor to put a school in headlines for "School in Need of Improvement".

– Superintendent

Big deal...in all candor we have attempted to convince our teachers to focus on the "big picture" needs of the child instead of one dataset produced by one test administration. While we have enjoyed some success in that endeavor, now that Tennessee ties teacher evaluation (50%) to

student achievement data and tenure may not be granted unless the teacher is in the top two performance groups, our challenge will be likened to “talking them off the ledge!”

– Administrator

It is a big deal as the data is used to drive instruction as we find holes.

– Administrator

Test scores are TOP priority of the Supt. and School Board, Principals have been directed to put pressure on staff to raise scores on MCA's, causing high anxiety among staff. Once results are received they are analyzed at the building grade level, not by teacher, although principals are aware of individual teacher results. MCA's are a big deal and teachers are stressed every year.

– Unknown

We prioritize the testing process. It is a “HUGE” deal to all of us in our school system.

–Teacher

More than seriously...It is a HUGE deal.

– Teacher

DATA DATA DATA! Data Team meetings with consultants, meeting every 2 weeks to collaborate. with PGAP (professional growth) to track students and teacher growth. Lots of strengths and weakness analysis. Embedded in curriculum...but it feels like teaching to the test. Embedded tasks in science and math etc...

DATA DATA DATA! SRBI, RTI, and every other acronym you can think of.

Again, it feels like teaching to the test, however, we try to make it fun. There isn't that much pressure but I can feel it building year by year.

– HS Special Ed Teacher

When January rolls around we are given a “calendar” of what we are supposed to be doing. It is a BIG deal! The teachers are frustrated because admin is throwing around numbers. At the beginning of the year, admin makes it sound like it's not a big deal, then when the numbers start being crunched, heads start rolling, and then you get the trickle down affect. We have pre-test and post-test, interim testing 3 times a year, and monthly testing.

–Teacher

The FACT is very important in my district. My peer teachers are very good teachers. They follow the state standards and also give practice tests or worksheets mostly to familiarize themselves with the way the questions are asked on the FCAT. The information needed for the assessment comes from the normal everyday instruction in the classrooms. I think the pressure is on the parents and the students since we have not had pay for performance yet.

– Administrator

Yes, testing is considered important. Our curriculum is aligned to the standards the students are being tested on. Testing takes up a lot of time. We feel it is important and time consuming.

–Teacher/Department Head

The only focus is on the test. Learning is a distant second. The test is a HUGE deal. Curriculum is continually interrupted so students can take more practice tests. The students are numbed by all this and do not do a good job on the test due to all the pressure placed on them.

– Administrator

Creating a new evaluation system, based on standardized tests scores-still have not determined how they will do this. Testing is a huge deal in our district, school admin (me) are under huge amounts of stress/strain to make sure all is done with fidelity, jobs are on the line.

- Educator
 - Holding teachers accountable only. It is a huge deal; it's all on the teacher however.

- HS Special Ed Teacher
 - We treat it confidentially and professionally. We take it seriously but know it is not necessarily accurate picture of our students' abilities. We do MAP testing twice a year and base much more of our practices on it. As a district we do not put much credence in the WKCE – performing at the 23 percentile in reading or math is hardly "proficient."

- HS Special Ed Teacher
 - Data assessment conducted annually with teachers to determine curricula changes necessary.
 - We prepare our curriculum to align with state standards. Our scores reflect that we do not teach to the test.

- HS Special Ed Teacher
 - Big deal, yes. We prepare all year and it is getting more and more all-consuming. Admin knows we do our best, but can't change reality (scores). The teachers stress, there is resentment of the time it takes away from teaching, and it takes a ton of time. We do extra games, assemblies, class pull-outs, small group pull-outs, after school tutoring, elementary level competitions, PD, etc. We do not put a priority on having an uninterrupted block of time to teach anything. Also, teachers are monitored by UNCERTIFIED unqualified aides to make sure we follow time wasting procedures and paperwork policies.

- Principal
 - It is a big deal since we risk losing our charter (therefore closing our doors) and our kids are very low. There is huge achievement pressure for everyone but I feel it more because this is a charter school and more because we serve the at-risk. During testing days we do give kids an additional nutritious snack (and water) before testing. The week before our optional, internal standardized test (Terra Nova) we give a very quick practice test.

- Teacher
 - Our curriculum is mandated by the district. In areas that are tested (reading, math) we are required to "prep" once a week. For example, in reading we have FCAT(FL Comp. Achievement Test) Friday that includes reading FCAT passages and practicing strategies to answer questions related to the passage. We also have two FCAT simulation tests during the year to see where we stand concerning students' grades. It is a big deal in our district. FCAT drives everything. As stated above, we include test prep in our curriculum, and we conduct simulation tests. Teachers do their best to keep the focus on the actual curriculum. We impress on students that they are learning not just to pass the test, but because beyond the test they will use their knowledge in their lives.

- Teacher
 - The pressure to teach to the test is taking education out of the classroom. They only care about the numbers, which must rise and rise and rise. Suppose you must do the high jump to pass high school..... you can jump.... only so high....and then they raise the bar. The test is flawed and poorly written. One test cannot determine a child's success.

 - It's the BIGGEST DEAL, the ONLY deal. They give unending repetitious pre-tests (two sets of two hour BAT test almost back to back).....with no progress shown from prior year's results, causing kids to shut down. They demand monthly writing tests, making it impossible to actually teach the skills....also shutting the kids down on the on the whole process. They are the be all and end all of our jobs. We comply.

- Teacher
 - Those in power are very strict about its importance and about administration procedures which maintain the integrity of the test. I think we are well prepared and we are able to prepare our

students well. I'm not afraid of being accountable. Most teachers have a bad taste in their mouth about their effectiveness as a teacher being based so much on the FCAT test. I agree with them that this is not the best way to determine teacher effectiveness.

– Principal

Yes, it is a big deal. We try not to allow test scores to define us but results are printed in the paper, comparing each school to each other and to the state average. Calendars with test dates go home at the beginning of the year. School test coordinators are trained at the district level in testing and test security. They, in turn, train the staff at each school in testing and test security.

Testing does not define who we are but we have to be able to show parents and the community the wonderful things we are doing. It is too much, too often, they take too much time. We we aren't testing we are practicing with similar assessments. In the words of Dudley Flood, "Hogs don't get fat because you weigh them."

Q2) Have you heard of cheating in your area? If so, by whom (teachers, principals, aides, students, etc.) and how is the cheating being done? (NO NAMES needed). How prevalent was the cheating? (How many were involved?) Was it with administrative knowledge and or approval? Were the students involved? List any other pertinent details...

– Retired Teacher

No cheating, but new legislation will kick in next year for ALL schools in Louisiana whereby teachers will be evaluated based 50% on student scores. We'll see what happens then.

– HS Teacher

Yes, cheating occurs but is subtle because some teachers have abandoned classroom instruction in place of "teaching to state mandated tests." Test content is also shared among teachers in the lower grades and in the high school level, graduation rates are manipulated to graduate as many seniors as possible regardless of their classroom grades.

At the conclusion of the 2010 school year I was ordered by the Director of Schools and my school principal (who evaluates my performance) to graduate a senior with a 68 average. I was told by my principal not to mention it outside the classroom. After discussing this with colleagues at the main county high school of approximately 2,000 students, I was told that graduating students with failing grades occurred all of the time.

– HS Special Ed Teacher

Not in my building. I think people need to be really invested in the results in order to cheat and I don't think we're there. Of course, we're also not at risk of losing our jobs as a result - not yet, anyway.

–Teacher

Well, cheating is of course epidemic among students, and we fight it on every level. I've taught in this district for ten years and have never heard of any cheating to promote better scores on the state testing. I heard a rumor when I first arrived of an IB teacher (who left before I arrived) suspected of "helping" her students more than is allowed on the in-house assessment for the IB diploma (we get a \$50 bonus from the state for every student that passes our subject) up to \$2,000 per year. But the cheating suspicion came out after she left to teach in another state and on the scanty and perhaps confused evidence of a few students and at any rate so scandalized the principal (now former principal) that every teacher got dragged in and lectured and threatened with dire consequences if they so much as dreamed of it. I believe that case in Atlanta had to come from the top down. I just don't believe most people who go into teaching want to cheat. It pays too little; if you're a natural cheater there are much better professions to gravitate towards (I'm not naming them, but someone ran the economy into the dirt). But I also think that many teachers in the field who were threatened with loss of jobs in this economy if they didn't collude with, say, answer changes, would put their jobs (and hence their family's welfare) first, and who could blame them? Very few people can afford to lose a job for their principles and many would face ruin if they lost their jobs. My spouse has a good job and I would walk away from mine (which makes a third of his) in a heartbeat (and also sue in a heartbeat) if anyone above me suggested that my job depended on cheating, but I doubt very much that a lot of my colleagues would have that luxury.

– Assistant Principal – Middle School

We had two sets (4 students) that had tests that were thrown out for allegedly copying.

– HS Special Ed Teacher

I have heard of several cheating tricks and know of several firsthand. The ESL population will send in one student to take the OGT test and the rest might wait till makeup testing to hear the questions or the essay questions. They will wear long flowing sleeves, and take pictures with their camera attached to their lower arms. We were not aware until the testing company spotted the same responses on several different essays. This also included students in our district and students in another district. Also know of an ESL student stealing a test and we had to have a special version for make-ups.

– Administrator (Private, non-profit, special education school)

Of course there are stories in the paper each year. A charter school closed due to wide-spread cheating last year.

–Teacher

We had a situation of students cheating with each other. If the answer was A, someone would cough once and so on. Every child in the room made the same passing score; there was no proof of them cheating only what they told their friends. Many of these kids were smart, just not good test takers. They would be juniors in college now, military personnel etc.

– Administrator

My system has not had any cheating issues; however, nearby Baltimore City and other poorer systems have had significant cheating issues. According to news reports, this cheating is done with Principal's knowledge of teachers changing students' answers or in coaching students as they take the exam.

–Teacher

One instance ten years ago of a teacher reading a test to a student with an IEP who had a sudden unexplained and unreproduced bump in scores. Hard to pin down. Otherwise NO.

– Unknown

No cheating in my school, nor have I heard of any such issues in NH.

– Superintendent

A school system adjoining ours missed school due to bad weather on the day of the annual writing exam. The prompt from the assessment (yeah, I know, why didn't they use an alternate prompt for those not in school?) was accessed via student conversations, teacher conversations, etc. and three teacher decided to use the prompt for "practice." As the information became public, the scores were declared invalid and the teachers were non-renewed (no reason required or given).

In this particular situation three teachers were involved. A regional by-product has been an absolute sense of panic related to even the most remote threat of impropriety. The administration denied involvement in this case while the teachers alleged complicity via approval by the AP to use the prompt. Students involved? By all counts the prompt was provided to the teachers by students...

– Administrator

No, we have not had cheating. The tests are very controlled.

– Administrator

No.

– Unknown

There is NO cheating going on in our district. Our testing coordinator (Counselor) monitors the testing procedure and teachers and even visits classrooms during testing. He has our staff sign a good faith document before the tests.

–Teacher

One teacher in our district was fired for telling students the number of questions correctly answered. Two schools (my own included) were investigated for "excessive" erasures. 19 students in 12 classrooms exceeded the erasure threshold of three questions. Both schools were exonerated after interviews with teachers and students involved.

It would never be with administrative approval. We get pressure from our academic leaders, but only for higher scores as a result of academic progress.

– Teacher

Never. Our principal checks to make sure all rules and precautions are taken.

– HS Special Ed Teacher

I have heard of cheating, but not at the school I am currently in. [The cheating was done in one of the feeder schools that I was at before. It is obvious, when you get a 4th grade student, who received a 3 on the 3rd grade FCAT, and cannot read, or do any passage tests and receive higher than a 30%, there is a problem! It was more noticeable in math for the last couple of years. When we asked the students who their teacher was, it always goes back to the same school, and a group of 2 or 3 teachers. The 4th grade student I referred to was in my class, and received a 1 on the 4th grade reading test. She never received any intensive reading or extra help because her score was a 3. The student was placed in with a group of students who were reading at a 4th grade level, and had a 3 or 4 on the 3rd grade FCAT. This student struggled daily, not to keep up with the others, but just to keep up! Who suffers here?

We have had students tell us they liked taking the 3rd grade FCAT best because the teachers helped them. I don't know if admin was involved, and I never witnessed anything myself, just hearsay, from students and other teachers.

–Teacher

I have not heard of any cheating in my district and I have been employed here for 6 years.

– Administrator

To my knowledge cheating does not exist in our school district. We would highly discourage teachers, principals, aides, students, etc. to cheat.

–Teacher/Department Head

One instance: A principal of a high school (now area superintendent) threw out all of the low level students test before they were sent to be scored. The administration was involved.

– Administrator

Our school makes the best effort possible for no cheating. I have not heard of cheating at our school.

– Educator

Every year we hear of cheating, this year it was teachers. It happens all of the time, not sure if administrator knew about it.

– Counselor

I have heard of absolutely NO cheating in our district.

– District Administrator

No. I believe this is all an overreaction to a few bad apples. We have legislators who cheat. We have business people who cheat. We have law enforcement who cheat. This is about society, not education. The large majority are good, honest teachers and administrators trying to do their job. Some people cheat in life and the rest suffer the public consequences of their actions.

–Teacher

I know of a counselor who just told the answers out loud during the test. Nothing happened. I know of a teacher who was allowed to have a student sit beside her after everyone else was finished and take the test and I know she was talking with the student. I know of a teacher who kept a booklet after they were picked up and it was dismissed as an honest mistake. All of these people are "principal's pets" and could get away with anything they tried. All were known to principal. The teacher who "forgot" to turn in a test booklet (who has a scanner and a document camera in her room) is best friends with the counselor who is in charge of test security. The main reason I do not trust her is the fact that I deal with her every day and I have seen her construct elaborate lies in order to get her way.

– Principal

I know some schools have multiplication tables and Expanding Expressions Tools visible and they are not supposed to. I asked the State to specify these examples and they refused. They asked me to report specific schools using my name.

– Principal

In 2007 the test was run differently than now and schools had a few days window for each test. After the first day of the writing test, a newspaper reporter published a writing prompt. Schools statewide continued to administer the test. A month or so later the state decided the report had invalidated the test and every 6th grader statewide would have to re-take the writing portion of the standardized test. What a mess!!! Here's one of many reports about it:
http://blog.mlive.com/annarbornews/2007/10/some_students_will_have_to_ret.html

– Teacher

I have heard of cheating in my area. I've heard of teachers in another elementary school who "helped" their students with questions in the past. I think now there are specific personnel who monitor the tests instead of the classroom teachers. I don't think the administrator found out until later.

– Teacher

I have heard of cases where teachers have cheated although I do not know of anyone personally. Security procedures during testing help eliminate much of the cheating, however, I suppose for teachers that do not have a proctor in their classroom, it would still be possible. Examples of cheating I have heard of: One teacher assisted student with answers; administration goes over tests after they have been turned in and changes answers.

– Teacher

No, I have not heard of any cheating in my area.

– Teacher

I knew of two teachers (now retired) who admitted to giving children hints. They justified it because of their view that the question(s) was/were unfair since the terminology stumped the child, not the concept (which they believed the child knew well).

No administrative knowledge of the cheating that I know of. The teachers didn't feel they were cheating.

Q3) What is YOUR take on standardized testing (good, bad, evil, wonderful, helpful, useless, laughable, anxiety-producing... Feel free to use whatever adjective best describes your view.)? How does it impact you, your students, faculty, school, neighborhood, etc.?

– Retired Teacher

If elected to the Board of Education I will do everything in my power to see that high stakes tests are eliminated. NCLB needs to be eliminated. Wastes time in school. Teachers should NEVER be evaluated based on these student test scores. Hard to believe that ANY intelligent person could support these tests.

– HS Teacher

Standardized testing cannot measure the intrinsic aspects of teaching or take into account the environments or social factors that students lack.

– HS Special Ed Teacher

I feel that I spend much of my time working to bolster my students' attitudes toward working hard to counteract their learning disabilities and ADD/ADHD. When we get into standardized testing, I see their frustration take over. They're trying to answer things they haven't learned yet; they talk about feeling stupid because they have NO idea how to do some of the test items. They get slammed by having to write without spell-check or editing assistance. They begin to revert to the old survival habits of the learning disabled kid - do only the "easier" items, write as little as possible with the most basic language/spelling, give it a half-hearted attempt, and hurry to be done.

This year our district didn't meet AYP in math at both elementary and high school levels. We were hurt badly by the high percentage of special education students in the district, but the state chose to set things up in a way that created that issue. The math issue is being reviewed and facing some redesign this summer... we'll see how that works out. If nothing else, it might satisfy the school board, the town's school budget committee (an angry "question everything" group in town), and the taxpayers for the time being. I'd like to be positive about the changes that might come of this, but I'm not holding out a lot of hope.

–Teacher

Well, the state testing appears to be laughably bad, if the sample questions sent home with my second grader are any indicator. The questions I've seen, which we're told are representative (but I don't know if that means they're from previous tests since apparently every aspect of the testing is a state secret) have been riddled with grammar errors, mistakes in the allegedly "correct" answers, and just badly written questions. We both have Ph.D.'s in literature, and if we can't figure out what a multiple choice question on the 3rd grade reading test is trying to elicit, I doubt if most 3rd graders could. Half of them sound like they were written by high school dropouts and the other half by people doing drugs.

– Assistant Principal – Middle School

My community is most interested in survival from day to day and week to week. The school grade is very important to our elected Superintendent.

– HS Special Ed Teacher

Standardized testing does have a place but let's take a good look at the students - How is it fair for ESL students to pass an English portion being in the country four or five years? We as a district are moving away from grammar - don't know why - the scores on the English ACT section are terrible. It cost my school students admission to a four year college, sport scholarships, and some merit scholarships. The students hand down from class to class that they will not do well on the ACT.

– Administrator (Private, non-profit, special education school)

As I stated above, My overall comment is that standardized testing has become a horrible example of Neo-Liberalism gone amuck, the imposition of education policy from non-educators, many of whom are eager to privatize education in the US to move money into the hands off their corporate pals, and the “Standards Movement” is a convenient means to their end . I am less concerned with the cheating aspect which is an unfortunate, but understandable ramification....Now the tying of teacher evaluations to test scores is the rage, which is patently unfair to those working in traditionally low-performing schools. There is NO EVIDENCE that standardization has had a positive impact on learning in the US.

– Administrator

I think that standardized tests have raised the quality of teaching, resulting in more solid knowledge gained about the topics on the tests themselves. However, I also think that this has narrowed the scope of what is taught at the expense of encouraging a well-rounded educational experience. Testing has created an atmosphere where inquiry and enrichment are not valued (not to mention the devaluation of subjects not assessed at the State level to meet NCLB goals).

– Unknown

A ridiculous waste of valuable time and money. The test does not even measure what I think is important for students to know and be able to do for success in the 21st century. It is contrary to best practice in the field of education! Since when did politicians and misguided school board members become the experts on education? Is anyone listening to educational experts like Douglass B. Reeves, Yong Zhao, Robert J. Marzano, Rick Wormelli, Anne Davis, Ken O’Conner, Grant Wiggins? Is anyone listening to statisticians that show how grossly misused these tests are – John Tanner – will give people an earful!

– Superintendent

Burdensome trending to oppressive...I would like to think that it is designed to be helpful and to assist in the instructional process.

– Administrator

...no test is a total measure of learning. These standardized tests do not really measure a student’s total problem-solving skills or creativity. These are also very important. I feel that most of the populace does not really understand the difficulty of neither the tests nor the testing situation. When we talk about scores, they do not realize, for example, that this includes special education and ELL students. They also tend to think of tests as measuring the same things as they had to know back when they were in school – not so!

– Administrator

The tests are useless, anxiety producing, and providing little if any valuable information about anything.

– Unknown

Very much anxiety producing for ALL involved. It is what it is and we have to do our best, so we do!

–Teacher

It’s horrible for at-risk students who perform consistently poorly. Bright students find the assessments tedious and a waste of their time. Average students are nervous, but generally perform satisfactorily.

– Teacher

Helpful, anxiety producing, Impacts my students stress level (b/c of the parents stressing- not me stressing.) We let the students get comfy, chew gum, and other strategies for relieving stress...

– HS Special Ed Teacher

Some students struggle with the anxiety of the test which makes their scores lower. This year, we were locked down the whole entire day for 4 days one week and 2 days the next week. We all had to go to another classroom to take the test, so the admin could accommodate the SPED and ESOL students which were not allowed to leave the classroom they were in the entire day. They even had lunch, cold sandwiches, brought to those classes. Imagine trying to entertain QUIETLY 20 SPED students who don't really know what they are doing or why they are doing for 6 days!

–Teacher

Special Education students are often told they are stupid and can't do something. This is just one more important thing that reinforces that idea to my students. My job is to build them up, but the state tears down what I do.

– Administrator

I believe in standardized testing as a way to measure how our students do compared to the rest of the state or nation. Good tests are critical and ideally access to on-line testing where appropriate provides efficiency. For me, it takes a tremendous amount of time to oversee 16 schools during the testing window. Typically there are lots of questions.

–Teacher/Department Head

The way it is used, it causes anxiety for all involved.

– Administrator

The impact is devastating to most students/families, with good or bad outcomes. There is way too much emphasis put on standardized testing...

– Educator

You feel that standardized tests are evil and useless. It angers me to see kids try so hard, some getting sick over a test that will mean nothing to them later.

We had a situation of students cheating with each other. If the answer was A, someone would cough once and so on. Every child in the room made the same passing score; there was no proof of them cheating only what they told their friends. Many of these kids were smart, just not good test takers. They would be juniors in college now, military personnel etc.

HS Special Ed Teacher

MAP scores are helpful and getting the results immediately is crucial. Standardized testing like the WKCE where we are almost out of school by the time we see results is pretty worthless.

– HS Special Ed Teacher

I believe it isn't worth the time or money put into it. Nobody has ever figured out how to test with 100% accuracy and validity the individual needs of children....whether race, disability, income, etc. Nobody has ever figured out how to apply percentages equally when comparing a school of 500 vs. a school of 5000.

– HS Special Ed Teacher

Accountability is necessary, but these tests are not the way. This is just the ego of Arne Duncan in a huge power play that is harming America's education system. If people just knew who is actually behind all this "reform" and how they are out to get their hands on the money that is in

public education it might change things. Follow the money, eventually it is getting into the hands of some rich person or corporation that has nothing to do with education. The push right now is for more testing even when there is no money for teachers or resources. That should tell everyone that reform and testing are not about doing the best by America's children, it is about money. The testing is not even in line with brain development and demanding higher standards or common core is not going to change brain development. Arguing this point gets you accused of being lazy, thinking kids can't learn, or just not wanting to be held accountable. The tests are being misused and they are not well written. Someone wrote them to fill some need other than knowing how well our children were learning.

– Principal

I think there is some benefit to using standardized testing (I need data to be an effective administrator) but it is WRONG to use this testing to judge schools, to judge teachers and to judge students. This data, just like any other I collect, should be used as a TOOL to help students and as one piece of information informing me of the effectiveness of teachers. Also, just like there is more to a child than multiple choice reading and math -- there is more to the effectiveness of a school than the data collected from these tests. I have been under threat of my school closing for 2 years due to low test scores even though our students are growing at a great rate, we have 100% parent satisfaction (who has that???) and our students are happy, healthy, growing and learning. Parents THANK US for being a school that cares about their children and helps them to learn – no matter what. Now our state has passed a law that I MUST use test scores to evaluate the teachers! ***groan*** It sounds so good in theory but it is messy and unfair.

– Teacher

... I don't feel the scores are always reliable. I wish there was a standardized test that only tested students on what we taught them

– Teacher

I believe standardized testing should be one assessment of several used to determine a student's achievement. I do not think that standardized test scores should be used to determine school funding, teacher salaries, or anything other than providing information on where a student is concerning whatever subject/skills are being tested. Districts/schools have been forced to allow the "test" to drive everything -- curriculum, scheduling, etc. Schools are eliminating classes that are not FCAT tested. At the moment, classes in Art, Music, Physical Education, Drama, etc. are quickly being eliminated to make room for double block reading and math. In the future, I believe we will see classes in History, Geography, Civics going the same way

– Teacher

I do not feel that high stakes tests provide an accurate picture of student achievement. They are terrible for students. Students stress about taking the tests. These tests help pit students and parents against teachers and they are something that most teachers that I know do not support standardized testing.

– Teacher

We are sick of it. Our kids feel like failures. If they don't pass the 10th grade FCAT they give up and a large percentage drop out at 16.

Q4) Do you feel that your job/position rests on these scores? Would you mind if it does/did? In other words, how is annual testing impacting YOU personally and professionally?

– Retired Teacher

I retired last year. These scores should not be used to evaluate teachers. There are other ways to ensure accountability that are not being instituted properly. I am working hard to effect change in this policy.

– HS Teacher

Beginning with the 2011-2012 school year, teacher jobs WILL rest on annual test scores. In my specific case, the state of Tennessee has decided that 50% of my evaluation will come from four yearly classroom observations; 35% will come from an AVERAGE (not even a standard test score) since my particular disciplines do not have end-of-course tests. A student average of the school population will be used for this part of my evaluation. These are students I have never had in class, have never instructed, and whom I do not know; the remaining 15% of my evaluation is, as of yet unknown, as to what it will be based on – all of this, my job depends on and school starts in less than 2 weeks. I am currently looking for any/every possible way to get out of this profession as are many of my colleagues who have been teaching significant periods of time.

– HS Special Ed Teacher

I don't think my job is at risk as a result of test scores, or even if budget cuts hit, but only because I'm the most senior special ed. teacher of the four in my building - and I think I do a good job even if seniority weren't the basis for keeping positions. As part of the staff that pushes for the best in our school, I think we're on dangerous ground any time we gauge people's jobs on how someone else performs, particularly teenagers who don't see the issue from the same side as we adults do. And isn't it ridiculous that we even have to discuss that? Isn't common sense out there somewhere? (Yes, I know it is in NAREN - I heard a lot of it at the conference in February.) We talk a good game in the education field about how students should be viewed as individuals, and then are told that we're to herd them into the pens of standardized testing to see if we're teaching them the same material and if they're learning at the same pace.

–Teacher

I couldn't care less personally, but it's a horrible waste of time for my colleagues who have to teach the test instead of really teaching, and a waste of the students' time who should be learning how to think instead of how to second-guess test questions.

– Assistant Principal – Middle School

I was Principal for ONE year because of a decrease in FCAT scores. We may still end up with a C grade based upon our D/E students, industry certification, and our graduation rate. We work hard to make sure our students were aware of what was needed for graduation. We sat down and scheduled each student's schedule last spring.

My school had the third highest attendance rate in the last 10 years. Lower discipline issues and higher graduation rate, but I still was replaced. I have been moved to an AP position at the local middle school.

– HS Special Ed Teacher

My school's average is around a 17 - No I should not be judged on their scores. I have been trying to run after school classes to tutor for the ACT but seniors don't stay. Some are busy working to support family, father not in home, mother on drugs, been kicked out of house, etc.

– Administrator (Private, non-profit, special education school)

I have less pressure, since no one really cares about my students, who have essentially been removed from their district.

– Administrator

Our system will be piloting a new evaluation tool for teachers next year based in part on standardized test performance. This tool is being developed and we have only been privy to very broad sketches of the possible final product. An evaluation tool for principals will be second (and no word of a timeline for a similar tool for assistant principals.... we sort of get ignored whenever anyone discusses education)

–Teacher

I don't know anymore. This teaching gig is getting weirder by the semester. These strange neurological differences and health conditions so many of these kids have now baffled my best teaching practices. The tests have so many errors that I don't trust the results. I'm angry about the for profit testing business that functions in secrecy but yields so much power.

– Unknown

The amount of time spent trying to stay off a school in need of improvement, with benchmarks that are now impossible to meet, has tired me and taken much of the enjoyment out of what I do professionally in my administrative role. I am saddened deeply by what this environment of high stakes testing has done to our public schools, our kids and our educators.

– Superintendent

I have been quick to provide information to my Board and community suggesting that standardized tests are "one" measure rather than "the" measure that we use to evaluate our schools. However, with the tightening noose of AYP and the new gallows of Race to the Top, I may have become a "voice in the wilderness." I am becoming too cynical, and if canned today, I can't say that I would really care.

– Administrator

Yes, my position is affected by this. I think using test scores for advancement in pay or job security is stupid. What will happen is that those students who need the very best – those who struggle the most – will be shifted to teachers with less seniority and expertise. How can that help?

– Administrator

Currently, my job does not rest on test scores, but they definitely increase the pressure of the job.

– Unknown

My job is not directly related to test scores, but we do want to do well!

–Teacher

I would hate to be a young teacher. My pay is not currently dependent upon student test performance. In two years, teachers who do not jump on board the performance pay bandwagon, will more than likely never receive a raise in pay; this includes me. I don't plan on placing my job on the line for the "Big bucks" of performance pay. Money doesn't make me work harder. Self-imposed standards for excellence make me evaluate my performance each year during the summer and modify my instruction from test results.

– HS Special Ed Teacher

No, I don't feel that my "job" rests on these scores but I feel that my "position" does! They moved many teachers around this past year, but waited until scores came out to do it. So basically, we found out our "tentative" assignment the very last day of school, at the last hour!

– Administrator

Not at this time. Yes. It requires a lot of time.

–Teacher/Department Head

I have been teaching for so long, it does not impact me personally. I am concerned about my younger staff members. They lost their passion to educate students. They are looking for other fields to get out of the profession.

– Administrator

I would not mind if my job rests on test scores as long as it is done with integrity and equitably. I know I approach testing and education with integrity, but the few who do not care are the ones that bring us all down. Also, how do you "compare" test results for a reading vs. elective

teacher? What about the teachers who have the lowest and highest 25%? How will we keep quality teachers if they are not treated with the same evaluative "tone" as other teachers? There is too much that has not yet been considered and/or overlooked.

– Educator

In Florida, our pay is going to be attached to test scores, I've asked for more advanced students, because the level of students I teach are not interested in school and have very little parenting at home, I can't compete with that.

– Counselor

My job does not rest on these scores, but a LOT of my time (as a counselor) is taken up by the organizing, administrating, etc. of this test. I would like to see it discontinued.

– District Administrator

Absolutely it does. It shouldn't, but it does. How my tiny school with high poverty, high at risk population compares to a large district of thousands more students should not be relevant because they are apples and oranges. Yet our state and federal government keep throwing things around line "no child left behind" and "adequate yearly progress" which are all based on large percentages. These come with the threat of the state taking over the management of the school district. Are you serious? That is absolutely stupid. People at the state and federal levels need to figure out what a valid test and valid scoring are before they pretend that they can take over our schools.

–Teacher

I think my job could be at risk because of the scores if our state does away with tenure. That said, my scores are in line with the rest of the scores in our school, but I have been there for 15 yrs and I have a master's degree so I am at the top of our salary schedule. \$36,200 is not much of a salary but I would hate to lose it. I think the scores need to be more aligned to the reality of children and brain development. Teachers are not supposed to look at or read the tests, but I cannot monitor my students without seeing some of the test. The questions I have seen are ridiculous for third grade kids. I know how third grade brains work and I can understand exactly what they are thinking when they answer incorrectly. I think we should test, but just to inform instruction. We need to hold teachers accountable in some manner, but I do not think the tests as written should have anything to do with it.

– Principal

Yes, I absolutely feel my job rests on these scores. Yes I mind! It is very stressful, personally and professionally. I love data but this is data-abuse! Unfortunately it is damaging the teachers perception of data so it actually lessens their ability to use it as a tool.

– Teacher

Currently I don't feel that my job/position rests on these scores, but whose to say it won't with the current state of education. I guess I wouldn't mind if my job rested on scores if the following was in place:

- Testing measured only items that have been taught at each level
- Assessments were given more than 3 times per year
- A wide variety of assessments were given instead of only 1 or 2 standardized tests
- Special learning needs were taken into consideration (special education, at-risk students, etc.)

– Teacher

Test scores absolutely affect individual teachers, administrators, schools, and districts. It can be very stressful being held accountable for test scores when there are so many variables that you cannot control. Poverty, parents, students, funding, etc., influence tests scores, especially when you are looking at one test score (a snapshot) of what a student is capable of doing.

– Teacher

Florida is a Race to the Top state which makes my salary dependent on student test scores. I think this idea is wrong on many levels. First, I should be evaluated based on my performance not in the performance of someone else.

– Teacher

No.....my position is secure. How can ANY teacher be responsible for kids who are hungry, chronic truants, sleep in class at best, disrupt at worst, and consist of a large percentage who do not speak English as a first language? At least 70% of my current 10th graders could care less about testing. They are here to socialize. This is a HUGE change from 5 years ago. Teachers with high level learners will certainly be pleased to see scores reflected in their pay, but who chooses what classes teachers get? Will our salaries also be in the hands of our principals and APs who do the scheduling?

– Teacher

Test scores absolutely affect individual teachers, administrators, schools, and districts. It can be very stressful being held accountable for test scores when there are so many variables that you cannot control. Poverty, parents, students, funding, etc., influence tests scores, especially when you are looking at one test score (a snapshot) of what a student is capable of doing.

– Teacher

I believe my job does rest on these scores to some extent. However, my principal is in my room often and knows firsthand my capability. She expresses praise often. I know that often differing populations of students produce widely different outcomes while my teaching remains steadfast and consistent.

– Principal

I do not feel my current job is impacted by our test scores. It would bother me if it were. Test scores have typically been a bit of a downer for the last few years. AYP seems impossible to meet for our school. I believe there are certain geographic issues (huge school attendance area, resulting in low parent participation at school) that are not taken into account.

Q5) Lastly, do you perceive the “at-risk population” – students AND teachers – as being treated differently in the standardized testing scenario, i.e., exempted, mainstreamed, etc.?

– Retired Teacher

Schools are finding numerous ways to get around the effects of tests scores of the "at-risk population." Charters, in particular, are limiting the numbers of special education students accepted in their schools. Students are being expelled and transferred to other schools, etc.

Our Governor knows exactly what he is doing with education. He is building political capital for his campaign for U.S. Senator and then President. His war chest grows daily while the education budget is cut and reform measures lead us to privatization.

There is no unwillingness to speak out in Louisiana. Our voices are silenced by much of the media. Lies proliferate and statistics are skewed and used to convince the public that public education is failing. I am going to the Save Our Schools March in Washington, D.C. in July. I am running for the Louisiana Board of Elementary & Secondary Education. We have a teacher running for Governor. The Louisiana School Board Association, Superintendents Association, Retired Teachers Assoc., LFT, LAE, National Board Certified Teachers and other organizations are united in our efforts.

– HS Teacher

Yes, “at risk” populations are given different classes, preferential treatment, special reviews, all of which are geared toward the state mandated tests that they must pass in order to graduate.

– HS Special Ed Teacher

I think I've answered this already in my response to #3, but accommodations for standardized testing shouldn't be considered sufficient or equivalent to the assistance I give my students. I work hard to get my kids to do their own work, but always with support at a level that can't match the state's provision of accommodations on these tests. The at-risk kids who aren't identified as special ed. (don't fit the qualifications, but are hurting educationally) don't get that extra encouragement that my kids do - they're spread out with the rest of the testing group and hear only the directions as printed in the test administrator booklet. I know they don't care about standardized test results and it's just another thing to get through. The regular curriculum is tough enough for a lot of them - why would they "try" on something that doesn't even yield a grade?

–Teacher

I've heard a lot of rumors, that I couldn't substantiate, about semi-literate students suddenly finding themselves semi-literate ESE students getting "special" diplomas and therefore exempt from testing, but I've not heard of an actual case of it at my school. It would, of course, be kept from the general knowledge of teachers if it happened, but still, they have teachers who would logically wonder if a large number of their students suddenly went on ESE status. The real beat-the-test strategy seems to be taking the ACT instead. The state allows seniors who have not yet passed the 10th grade test to substitute some acceptable score on the ACT, and I've heard guidance counselors urging teachers to encourage students at risk of not graduating to take this route, but I don't think that doing so helps the school at all by boosting scores. I suppose it does boost graduation rates, but I don't think it's that many kids. Most of the non-passers drop out before their senior year.

– HS Special Ed Teacher

No - These students work hard and need a different way to spit the information back.

– Administrator

We expend a good deal of resources to ensure that those "at-risk" students are provided with the remediation and educational supports needed to achieve their potential.

– Unknown

No they are not treated differently, a problem in of itself!

– Superintendent

Early in the consideration of "at-risk" populations it seemed that many were quick to blame our ED populations for lack of AYP attainment. Now, they have become just another sub-group, as the public begins to respond with the questions as to "why are 80% of the schools in the nation on notice?"

I am inclined to believe that waivers of NCLB are a "bad" idea and just providing a temporary respite. I would much prefer all 15,000 +/- school systems to be on notice and then the USDE could share the "secret" as to how we address the problem of failure in our schools. I have NO confidence in the USDE and the prevailing philosophy that one size and one curriculum fits all. If we expect to be measured via achievement on Core Curriculum, mandate for all and develop the test for administration for all...don't suggest that local control is of value and important while you emasculate local boards of education and curriculum specialists. I am disgusted that we give a test to a state sample and from that test infer how my students and teachers are doing in their workplace. IF NAEP is the GOLD standard, require NAEP of EVERYONE and then provide the outcome to ALL SCHOOLS.

– Administrator

That is part of the problem. We are trying to treat all students the same and they are not. Out of one side of our mouths we are saying that it is okay to take longer to learn something, but out of the other side we say they are under par and not as good as other students. I think this is leading to higher dropout rates. Teachers of these students from high poverty/drugs and alcohol

abuse areas are working hard to help students learn. They are being further chastised. People are leaving the education field and we are having difficulty getting replacements. Could low pay and high stress be at the root? Of course!

– Administrator

Yes, they have an impossible situation -trying to get their student up to grade level expectations. What amazes me is that when we were in AYP for the past two years we lost Title 1 money that needed to be focused on training staff, which meant of course that we lost money, \$36,000 of help for the struggling students. I know that training teachers is important, but kids should not be the ones negatively impacted. And NO the training, although good, was not the only reason for our district getting out of AYP.

–Teacher

Children of poverty rarely do well in school -- period. I wish I know how to fix the experiential poverty, but in my 38 years of teaching, I've seen more money thrown at children of poverty in the name of educational equity. Ruby Payne found limited success with her "registers," but simply put, students who are unintelligent will not perform well in public schools; they don't perform well in charter schools, nor do they perform well in private schools. Notice the "don't perform well" common thread. Having taught at-risk students for several years, I found it difficult not to feel like a failure, but I did feel like a failure when only 36% of my class had learning gains. It's difficult to provide consistent instruction when one of the most prominent traits of an at-risk student is irregular attendance. I teach in Florida, so students cannot receive a diploma without having passed the FCAT Math and Reading, which are grade-level tests. It is my professional opinion that a student with an IQ of 85 will never read at the 10th grade level, nor should he/she be expected to.

I care deeply about America's future; I think public education has been one of the best inventions in the history of humankind. Michelle Rhee taught three years? Really, Michelle? I have taught for 38 years! On the front line, in the trenches. I have kept current (and continue to do so on a daily basis) with technology. I strive to provide an interesting and challenging curriculum for my students. I had three students not pass FCAT reading this year. Should I be punished for the three students when 72 out of 75 passed, and 45 scored at the highest level? I don't think so. Children and education cannot be quantified; that's the bottom line. I honestly believe that the only people who are going to cash in on this great education reform are Pearson Learning (or other test makers).

– Teacher

Yes and No...If we differentiate their learning, why not then, the assessment? And then, I sometimes wonder if the tests are assessing the students or the teachers?

– HS Special Ed Teacher

The "at risk" students are the ones they want to see the most improvement from, but those kids are the ones that get shafted. This year we had one inclusion class for 4th grade. There was 33 students in there, 2 autistic kids, 11 SPED kids, and the rest were all low, receiving 1 and 2 on 3rd grade FCAT. SPED teacher was in and out. The atmosphere was always chaotic and this teacher had no back up...no one was there. How fair is that? If all the students are low how are they supposed to learn anything from one another, and we all know kids learn from each other!

–Teacher

I feel our at-risk students are not being treated differently. They are expected to accomplish the same scores on the tests as their non-at risk peers. The problem lies in the area of the skills the student knows at that moment. My Special Education students each have unique issues that made them qualify for my program. For example, I had a student transfer to my school this past August from another county in Florida. He failed 6th grade with very little assistance from his mother and his Special Education teachers. He moves here to be with his father who is gone most of the time, so he is left to stay with his aunt and grandmother. Although his aunt and grandmother are both doing the best they can, this child has a long history of no support in his

education and he then comes to my school thinking he will do nothing again. With all the support he was getting from my staff, he was still failing the 6th grade again because he refused to do any work in class. We tried different incentives and activities to help him and finally just at the end he passed enough classes to be promoted to the 7th grade. When we received his FCAT scores of a Level 1 again in Math and Reading, it didn't surprise me, because he didn't learn the skills needed to even show any improvement. He even admitted to just marking answers. I know what all was put into this child and even at the last few weeks, his teachers did not give up on him, but here is a student who is expected to pass the FCAT and his teachers who did their best all year, will be looked down upon because this student did not show improvement. Our ESOL students are some of the best behaved and smart students we have at my school, but the culture difference will always be there when it comes to testing. I watch them struggle with our speech patterns and expressions but they are willing to learn and try very hard. Then the test results come out and the ESOL students who have had more time at our school will pass most of the time, while the others will still get levels 1s or 2s. Once again this is hurtful to the student's self-esteem. They can't get help at home because their parents only speak Spanish. This is just one more thing that separates them from their peers.

– Administrator

The stakes are high with underperforming subgroups. There is a lack of resources to help all of the children become proficient. We know what to do in most cases; however, we can't afford the technology, the programs, and the teachers to help get it done.

Our state was very interested in trying to get "Race to the Top" funding. We did not get it though we applied. The hoops were too rigid and the amount of funding too little if we would have got the funding. In too many states, school funding was supplanted by gaming proceeds when the communicated intention was additional funding. We do need more funding for education and creative minds to help work out solutions that work for today's students and teachers.

–Teacher/Department Head

The "at-risk" students get all of the attention and pressure. Teachers with lower level (at-risk) students are being harassed with weekly visitations.

I am concerned about public education in general. The push over the last decade is to close public schools and to privatize education. That would save the state millions of dollars. This is a great way to accomplish that goal. These standardized tests are not improving education the way they are being used they are hurting it.

– Administrator

Yes. The pressure to make an annual learning gain is extreme with many students who really don't see the significance of their outcome on the teacher, or, they do see the significance and want to "burn" their teacher and/or school [by deliberately making false responses].

– Educator

Yes, to make matters worse there are changes being made to Exceptional students. They will be in our already low performing classrooms and are expected to make the same gains as regular kids. Teachers are not trained to teach these students, and many did not sign up for Exceptional Student Education. I see it as another way to attempt to privatize education so that the rich can continue to control things they know nothing about. I'm going to do whatever I have to do, with no exceptions to make my pay.

– District Administrator

Our at-risk population is not exempted from any testing. We do our best to provide appropriate testing environments for all.

– Counselor

The political grandstanding using the arena of public education is ridiculous! Politicians need to keep their noses out of education and standardized testing unless they are going to take the time

to meet with the teachers, administrators, students and parents and find out the different chemistry that goes into each and every building. No two schools are alike, so quit trying to hang your political hats on your bogus testing and threatening messages to schools that don't score up to YOUR standards. Get informed or leave us alone and let us educate. You want to save money in public education? Turn the national and state testing costs into dollars we can teach with. It's time to recognize and start honoring the meaning of local control!

–Teacher

I think it is stupid to test students with IEPs and expect them to be on grade level. Why bother with IEPs if everyone is the same? I had two students last year who did not make it into special education, but did not function high enough to pass the test. It is not my fault they are academically challenged and there is nothing the students' parents could do to fix it either or they would. I don't think reality has been considered in this whole scenario. Growing up poor or in a dysfunctional home means you do not have the same opportunities as other people and it impacts your learning. Now everyone is jumping on the "demonizing teachers" bandwagon without a clue as to the reality of the situation. If we stay on the path that Arne Duncan and President Obama have us on for education, it is going to be a disaster. In our small rural school, nepotism, cronyism, and favoritism are already rampant, it will just increase with easier ways to get rid of anyone who might want to question the administration when things don't seem right. I could go on and on, but I will spare you!

– Principal

In my area I feel at-risk students are treated the same in standardized testing. But same isn't necessarily fair.

Are we looking at growth or static data? My students actual achievement level is low but their growth is strong -- and getting stronger. My own children attend a private school where the teachers appear to me to be doing a mediocre job -- but the students are top performers.

Should those teachers should be complimented for their success and rewarded more than my hard-working teachers who are doing everything they can to help at-risk students to learn?

[I have a] story of a first grade boy crying in the hall outside the classroom. An ISD employee happened to be in our building and asked the teacher if he was upset because he was about to take a standardized test. She replied, "No, he is upset because his mother hasn't been home in 3 days and he is scared and worried about her. And, yes, NOW he has to go and take a standardized test."

– Teacher

Yes. There are some populations of teachers and students that will have an extremely hard time being successful despite special considerations.

– Teacher

No, they are all part of this terrible system.

– Teacher

There is no difference in their treatment. It is very annoying to be compared to wealthy/ middle class kids living in non-minority school districts whose teachers and staff make twice our salaries.

Please stop comparing the kids from Winnetka and Green Bay to kids from South Florida.... 90% of my students qualify for free-lunch. When there is a school holiday, they don't eat. Their parents work two or three jobs, they are being raised by siblings barely older than themselves, and many of our young girls are "babies having babies". Their role models are urban musicians, not teachers or professionals. They are out of the job loop. They are not being prepared for viable realistic work after graduation. The kids with the test scores to attend college do not have the financial ability to do so. The kids without FCAT scores to graduate are out of luck.

– Teacher

Yes. There are some populations of teachers and students that will have an extremely hard time being successful despite special considerations.

– Principal

Due to the idea that EC teachers are expected to test the students they teach and each student has his own special accommodations, those teachers end up testing so much during testing season that it is impossible for them to keep up with the IEPs they are expected to maintain. As far as students, I don't see them treated differently because of testing.

I believe Republicans are using testing, test results, lack of school funding, and talk of merit pay to bring down free public education as we know it. They make it obvious they want more private and charter schools and it is the families without means that will end up getting hurt. They use test scores to say the current system is broken when actually the measures we are using are inappropriate.

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[Please see Appendix for ALL responses. Despite the quotes selected for the main body of this monograph having been shortened – none of the wording has been changed. Despite some of similar quotes having been eliminated every effort has been made to keep representational proportions of viewpoints expressed.]

Conclusion

Why not listen to the experts?

My colleague, Dr. David Boers, one of the great champions of at-risk kids at the higher education level, and I were dejectedly discussing the meteoric rise of the high-stakes testing insanity and the quickly receding hope and despite the obvious need for increasing child-centered education in our public schools. In other words, resources that kids desperately need in present day public education are diminishing while expenditures for things useless for child growth and development are increasing. “We really care about children!” banner-talk by Congress is more and more unrelated to what teachers in the field and pragmatic educational experts such as David, Douglass Reeves, Jerry Conrath, Lynn Stoddard, David Berliner, Frank Kros, and Alfie Kohn, are saying is truly needed. It is a sad day when political posturing and profiteering testing companies take precedence over our kids’ needs.”

“Hmmm,” I responded, “That must be why Educational Testing Service had seven lobbyists in Tallahassee year before last and they are only one. I think Houghton, CTB McGraw-Hill, and Pearson may be larger.”

“I understand that just the scoring of high-stakes testing alone has turned into a multi-BILLION dollar industry in and of itself,” David said.

“That’s what I heard,” I said. “Good thing we don’t need all that money somewhere else.”

Campbell’s Law

Campbell’s law was formulated in 1975 by the late Donald T. Campbell, a respected social psychologist, evaluator, methodologist, and philosopher of science. Campbell’s law stipulates that “the more any quantitative social indicator is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption

pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it is intended to monitor.” (Nichols, 2007)

Testing experts George Madaus and Marguerite Clarke agree with Campbell, noting that whenever you have high stakes attached to some indicator of performance, you have a corrupted measurement system. The higher the stakes, the more uncertain are the conclusions you can draw from the measures you have. Put another way, the higher the stakes, the more likely it is that the construct being measured has somehow been changed. High stakes, therefore, lead inexorably to invalidity. Under these conditions, we must worry that the process that is being monitored by these test scores—the quality of our children’s education—is also becoming corrupted and distorted, rendering the test scores themselves meaningless. (Berliner, 2007)

A future monograph will investigate the multi-billion dollar test-making, administering, and scoring industry that has grown around this competitive testing disease that is infecting our schools, draining our resources so badly needed by the very students they weed out. Education has wandered far from being the nurturing and supportive environmental path it was designed to be. High-stakes scoring is also high-stakes scaring. Fear signals us that perhaps throwing snowballs at the prow of the Titanic in hopes it will change course is not enough. Perhaps we educators should insist on a full stop while conducting a thorough examination of the uncharted waters ahead. After all there are millions of children on board that are looking to us professionals for direction. And the waters are dark and cold.

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The National At-Risk Education Network (NAREN) is a private, non-sectarian, non-profit educational agency dedicated to both promoting the success of at-risk youth in our schools, and supporting the educators who work on their behalf. Over ten years ago on January 1, 2001, NAREN was incorporated as an outgrowth from the obvious need for educators of at-risk students to support one another by sharing their experiences and offering ideas and mutual understanding as only one educator in the trenches can offer to another. Out of this grew the Angel-Warrior Educator network that went from 65 the previous October to 600 members on that first day in January 2001. Since then NAREN has grown to a mailing list of over 39,000 educators who care about our at-risk youth and the potential of education. It is the largest organization of at-risk public school teachers and administrators.

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