

10 Facts you might not have known about high stakes testing in NYC

1. **Elementary school children are spending ever-increasing amounts of time taking standardized tests.**

The 3rd, 4th and 5th grade tests are almost doubling in length this year. Last year, students in these grades spent a total of 250 minutes, over 5 days, taking their ELA and math tests. That is 50 minutes a day, on average. This year, students will spend a total of 540 minutes over 6 days taking those tests. That is 90 minutes a day, on average. For some students with IEP's, those times will be doubled, meaning that they will spend 3 hours each day, for 6 days, taking tests.¹

2. **Your children are being put to work for the profit of a large corporation.**

One reason for the astonishing increase in the amount of time is that NCS Pearson, the for-profit company developing the tests, has embedded “field test questions” in the tests. They are not used to score students – they are being “tested out” to see if they can be used in future tests. In other words, your children are providing a free service for NCS Pearson, a company worth billions of dollars.

The Department of Education has not requested that parents consent to their children being used as research subjects for a for-profit corporation.

3. **Testing is big business.**

The Texas State Commissioner of Education, Robert Scott, called “the assessment and accountability regime” not only “a cottage industry but a military-industrial complex.” NCS Pearson, the company developing the tests, is being paid more than \$32 million over 5 years, to develop just the Math and ELA exams for New York State.

NCS Pearson made close to \$800 million in 2011 from its North American Education division.²

4. **The increased testing time this year is just the beginning. The Department of Education is planning to give MORE students MORE tests in the future.**

The city is currently developing tests for all grades, K-8. In 2014, the plan is to give as many as NINE different standardized tests a year – 5 in English, 4 in math.

5. **The Department of Education has structured school report cards to pressure schools to focus on student test scores to the exclusion of other forms of assessment.**

The Department's policies make a focus on test-prep inevitable, since they place such a huge emphasis on the test scores: 85% of a school's report card grade is based upon its test scores.³

6. **New York City's emphasis on high stakes testing has increased racial and economic disparities in access to education.**

In 2008, the Bloomberg administration began using a blunt cut score to determine admission to gifted and talented programs, instead of the previous standard, which included teacher recommendations and other measures of performance. Within a year, the number of students from the poorest districts in the city who were admitted dropped from 20.2% to 14.6%. In 2011, the number of black students admitted was 11%, an all time low.

7. **The recently released NYC Teacher Data Reports were, *by the admission of the NYC Department of Education itself*, highly unreliable. And yet, the city and state are about to institute a system relying on the same type of data to evaluate teachers – with high-stakes outcomes, including loss of teachers’ jobs – in public schools across the state.**

Teacher Data Reports had a 35-53% margin of error. In other words, a teacher who received a score of 50 out of 100 (“effective”) might have actually been a 25 (ineffective) or 75 (highly effective). If your doctor told you his scale was off by 30 lbs (in either direction), would you follow his advice to go on a diet? Would you trust a doctor who used such a scale?

8. **States where high-stakes testing were implemented early and aggressively are now seeing a backlash against them as the repercussions for teaching and learning become clear.**

Texas was the first state to use high stakes testing on a massive scale, and served as the model for the national “No Child Left Behind Act”, which required all states to institute high stakes testing. Texas is now experiencing a major backlash against it across the state. The state education commissioner, Robert Scott, said the mentality that standardized testing is the “end-all, be-all” is a “perversion” of what a quality education should be. And more than 100 local Texas school boards have passed a resolution calling for an end to the overuse of standardized testing in the state.⁴

9. **Experts in educational evaluation agree that high stakes testing undermines actual education.**

In its 2011 report to Congress, the National Academy of Sciences committee that Congress commissioned to review the nature and implications of America’s test-based accountability systems concluded, “There are little to no positive effects of these systems overall on student learning and educational progress, and there is widespread teaching to the test and gaming of the systems that reflects a wasteful use of resources and leads to inaccurate or inflated measures of performance.”⁵

10. **Low stakes standardized tests exist and have been in place for a long time. These tests are ones that educational experts have found to be valid and reliable, and are used only for the purposes for which they were intended.**

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) is a standardized test administered by the federal government to a random sampling of students from around the nation. Because the scores are completely confidential (it is illegal to identify a student who took the test) and because it does not report scores by school, but only by state and district, the NAEP scores are considered the “gold standard” of test scores. There is no incentive to cheat or prepare for the NAEP tests, because there are no direct consequences attached to performance on it. In other words, it is NOT a high stakes test, and so scores on it reflect the actual state of learning of those who took it, not whether they spent the last six weeks prepping for it.

¹ Source: New York State Education Department, Memorandum from Ken Slentz, Deputy Commissioner, NYSED, December 2011

² http://www.pearson.com/media/files/press-releases/2012/2011_Results_Press_Release_FULL.pdf, p.7

³ Source: <http://gothamschools.org/2010/09/29/city-to-release-progress-reports-with-new-formula-lower-grades/> and http://www.nytimes.com/2010/10/01/nyregion/01grades.html?_r=1&ref=nyregion

⁴Source: http://www.washingtonpost.com/blogs/answer-sheet/post/in-texas-a-revolt-brews-against-standardized-testing/2012/03/15/g1QA15N0VS_blog.html

⁵ Source: <http://www.statesman.com/opinion/insight/standardized-tests-with-high-stakes-are-bad-for-2230088.html>