

*High Stakes in Educational Testing*

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Ask many students what they dislike the most about attending school and chances are their answers will be similar to what educators, school officials and parents find discouraging about the educational system -- high stake testing.

**What is high stake testing and how is it used?**

High stakes testing does not refer to the difficulty or the subject matter of a particular test, but instead refers to how the results of a particular test is used. High stake testing occurs when the outcome of a single standardized test can determine the future educational opportunities of a student, or when a single test is used to evaluate the effectiveness of a school or of an educator. A high stakes test is defined as a single standardized assessment which has an established line between passing and failing, and where the rewards for passing the test are as great as the penalties for failing are severe.

Most students are required to participate in high stake testing on a regular basis throughout their education. High stake testing can begin as early as primary school programs, and is often the basis of determining the educational track a student will follow for the rest of his education. High stake test are used to determine which schools a student may attend, which special programs they may avail themselves to, and whether or not they will be promoted to the next grade level.

In addition to evaluating students, these types of tests are used to determine funding levels of schools, the accreditation of educational institutions, as well as salary levels and employment of teachers and school faculty.

### **Why is high stake testing bad?**

There are several reasons why high stake tests are criticized by many people in the field of education. The most common reason for criticism is that a single standardized test cannot show the true ability of a student or the effectiveness of an educator or a school. As with any standardized test, the uniqueness of a student's strengths cannot be evaluated, nor can the total ability of a teacher to connect with her students and educate them, in the larger sense of the word, be assessed from simple test scores of a standardized test.

Any test with so much riding on it gives undue pressure to both students and educators. Young students cannot be expected to realize the importance of a single test on their future lives. Many teachers and school officials feel that simply linking students' scores to the quality of the education provided is unfair. Doing poorly on such high stake testing can lead some students to depression, low self-esteem and other serious mental issues. Older students who perform poorly on high stake tests often give up in school once they are pigeon-holed as poorly performing students.

Another serious complaint against high stake testing is that these types of tests rarely reflect the curriculum of the school. Often teachers, who have much to lose from low test scores, spend valuable class time by straying from the school curriculum in order to ensure their students are prepared for test day. Teachers wind up teaching to the test and forgoing any class material that will not "be on the test".

**Who supports high stake testing?**

With so many negatives associated with high stake testing, who supports these tests? The majority of people who support this type of testing are public officials who call for accountability from schools and teachers. Numbers are easier to compare than other factors among schools. Proponents of high stake tests believe that the quality of education among different schools are best maintained by having a objective way to evaluate a school and faculties effectiveness compared to other schools and other teachers.

**What is the future of high stake testing?**

For the time being, high stake testing seems to be here to stay. Until parents and educators make their voices heard by government officials these types of tests are likely to become an ever-increasing part of education throughout the world.