

Enclosure 3h
May 8, 2014

The Future of High Stakes Testing

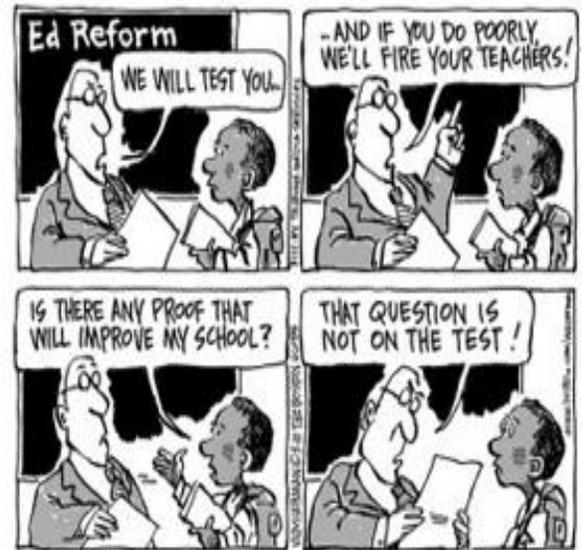
A Recommendation To: RI Board of Education

May 8, 2014



RITAC

RHODE ISLAND TEACHERS ADVISORY COUNCIL



RITAC Wants the High Stakes Out of Testing.

In July 2013 the RI General Assembly enacted a law establishing a council comprised of teachers from every district in the state as well as publicly funded charter schools. This council is known as the Rhode Island Teachers Advisory Council (RITAC). The purpose of RITAC is to provide a streamlined communication mechanism between teachers and the State Board of Education. In addition, RITAC will inform the policymakers about implementation, concerns, and/or practical issues regarding regulations and/or policies, whether proposed or promulgated. RITAC brings teachers into the conversation about policies and regulations which impact classroom activities and the education of our children in every district in the state. The teachers of RITAC take this responsibility seriously and have produced our first recommendation to the State Board of Education.

Standardized tests should only be used to inform instructional needs and curriculum development. Currently standardized tests are high stakes; they may prevent students from graduating and may lead to teachers being fired. Assessments, such as NECAP, should not be used as a graduation requirement because such assessments have not been proven valid and reliable for high stakes purposes such as promotion and graduation decisions. Research has also shown that these tests may narrow curriculum, and limit future educational opportunities, particularly for poor and minority students as well as English Language Learners and students with disabilities. Standardized tests are designed to inform decision-making at the district level.

For example, the NECAP scores from a fourth grade class in Pawtucket show that 80% of the students are either partially proficient or substantially

below proficient in mathematics. The administration should be able to use these results as a "red flag" to show the need for a change in mathematic instruction for the next school year; i.e. an additional mathematic specialist/coach for the teaching team, smaller mathematic class sizes, longer mathematic classes, a change in curriculum or additional mathematic classes. When these needs are addressed at the district level our students will have access to the proper interventions leading to academic success later on. (See Appendix A)

Regrettably, Rhode Island has insisted on using high stakes testing for reasons other than its intended use. **The Rhode Island Teacher Advisory Council recommends that testing should only be used to inform instructional needs and curriculum development. Additionally we recommend the discontinuation of using NECAP as a graduation requirement. We further recommend that high-stakes tests such as PARCC not be used as a graduation requirement or as a measure of teacher effectiveness in the evaluation system.**

Please read some of the results from our own questionnaire given to RI teachers regarding high stakes testing. (See Appendix B)

We look forward to hearing your decision regarding this manner.

Important Findings

- School Psychologist Report- "Before state testing begins we have noticed a rise in student anxiety related behaviors and responses"
- High stakes tests work on a bell curve...the test is designed to have students on both sides of the curve (well above and well below) it will never be a pass/ fail type of test.
- RI districts that have reported out so far have submitted several different waver policies for high-stakes testing.



Fall 2013 - Beginning of Grade 4 NECAP Tests

Grade 3 Students in 2012-2013

Grade Level Summary Report

School: Henry J. Winters School
 District: Pawtucket
 State: Rhode Island
 Code: 26-26119

PARTICIPATION in NECAP	Number									Percentage											
	School			District			State			School			District			State					
Students enrolled on or after October 1																					
Students tested	Reading	Math	Writing	Reading	Math	Writing	Reading	Math	Writing	Reading	Math	Writing	Reading	Math	Writing	Reading	Math	Writing	Reading	Math	Writing
With an approved accommodation																					
Current LEP Students																					
With an approved accommodation																					
IEP Students																					
With an approved accommodation																					
Students not tested in NECAP																					
State Approved																					
Alternate Assessment																					
First Year LEP																					
Withdrew After October 1																					
Enrolled After October 1																					
Special Consideration																					
Other																					

NECAP RESULTS

	School											District						State							
	Enrolled	NT Approved	NT Other	Tested	Level 4		Level 3		Level 2		Level 1		Mean Scaled Score	Tested	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1	Mean Scaled Score	Tested	Level 4	Level 3	Level 2	Level 1	Mean Scaled Score
	N	N	N		N	N	%	N	%	N	%	N			%	N	%	%			%	%	%	N	
READING				59	1	2	28	47	16	27	14	24	438	740	17	46	21	16	443	10,816	23	47	17	12	446
MATH				59	2	3	10	17	23	39	24	41	432	746	11	40	26	23	440	10,909	21	42	19	19	443
WRITING					= 20%				= 80%																

Level 4 = Proficient with Distinction; Level 3 = Proficient; Level 2 = Partially Proficient; Level 1 = Substantially Below Proficient

Note: Throughout this report, percentages may not total 100 since each percentage is rounded to the nearest whole number.

Note: Some numbers may have been left blank because fewer than ten (10) students were tested.

RITAC Questionnaire Responses from teachers all across the state!

What impact has high stakes testing had on administrators?

- “Scheduled faculty meetings waste too much time reviewing testing results, when we could be looking at the formative assessments we do on a daily basis to drive our instruction.”
- "Administrators feel pressured too. The climate of the schools and of the profession is changing...."
- "Administrators are stressed because their schools are rated and they buy into that system looking at it as a reflection of their success. The stress to perform trickles down to the staff and the students making for a toxic school climate."

What impact has high stakes had on curriculum?

- “Curriculum is no longer creative and based on student needs. It is based on test prep. School is seen as a place where kids are tested to death. It is no longer a place of expression and creativity. Everyone's hands are tied. Unfortunately, the ones tying teachers' hands have never been in a classroom. Curriculum is based on test prep. If students are doing the same thing day after day, eventually, they are going to see no relevance between their education and life. Life is not about taking test after test after test.”
- “I think the curriculum is the hardest hit. There is common core but no curriculum or materials! We are writing our own curriculum at times and I do not believe in this. I think there should be consistency. Never mind the fact that we do not have the time to write curriculum, plan lessons, prepare materials, correct papers and do all the necessary paperwork.”
- “As noted in one of the workshops I had attended some time ago... like building a plane while it is in flight!”
- “We focus more and more on how to take tests instead of how to work together. 21st century skills expect students to be equipped with skills to find answers and solve problems, but the tests don't look at this. They look at independent skills on answering questions.”
- “It is hard to get to curriculum because I feel I need to prepare kids for testing.”
- “We test, test, test, and have little time to teach in a way ALL students can benefit from. DIBELS testing takes up to two weeks three times a year, progress monitoring takes up to 45 minutes a week, math skill testing is another week three to four times a year. Enough is enough! My class has been conditioned to cheer when it's "testing time" just to try and diminish the stress.”

What Impact has high stakes had on teachers?

- Teachers are stressed by the potential scores, teach to cover the content expected in lieu of what they and the students find meaningful. "Teaching" becomes a mechanical, repetitive motion.
- “My focus is on scores and rushing and mandates at the expense of students and relationships. Everything is hurried, and I am running myself ragged. The value of kids is being traded in and I find that prospect very disheartening to say the least.”
- “We are overworked, do not know our students, and cannot take a day out of work even when we are sick. Subs are unprepared to work under the conditions we are working under. We test too much and worry about meeting the standards. We forget we are educating our future, a future that cannot and should not be based only on academic performance. What about caring, individuality, self esteem, empathy, and consideration for others?”
- “Teachers are more focused on teaching to the test to make sure their students pass. This leads to test prep and monotonous testing packets, excluding critical thinking skills and teachers teaching in ways that will captivate and excite their students. The art of being a great, inspiring teacher has disappeared.”

Appendix B

- “Less time to instruct, less time to reach curricular goals. More emphasis on teacher evaluation as related to scores tempts “teaching to the test” instead of fostering creative, learner-driven, motivational instruction. During lunch many colleagues have commented that “teaching is not fun anymore.”

What impact has high stakes testing had on the students and their families?

- "Students, from what I've seen are less connected to their teachers and the learning community as the materials required are mechanical and not meaningful. Students often ask to be "left alone" when teachers attempt to pour information into them. Teachers are seen as task masters to be avoided instead of role models or leaders."
- “As a PE/Health teacher I have watched good students suffer from anxiety and stress that has made learning a negative experience. We have a culture of professional test takers not problem solvers.”
- “With focus placed upon high stakes testing, there has been a failure to reform instructional environments and the manner in which we socially promote children who are not ready to progress forward.”
- “The time spent practicing for the test and the actual test taking significantly cuts down on the instructional time needed to meet the CCSS. The children are learning less. At the elementary level neither the parents nor the students truly understand what the results mean. I believe this to be true at my school at the very least. There are no consequences for testing poorly that they understand.”
- “The difficulty with the high stakes testing is that students get stressed out during the testing time and once results come in. In grade 3 I have seen students sob when they did not get a 3. Parents are angry and feel that they did not see a 'true' picture of their child. They also worry about the future of the child in these young grades. Often I have seen some of my brightest students do poorly on the testing due to circumstances beyond their control. For example, one day a student came in after being removed from his home. He was under severe duress. Unfortunately according to testing- who cares? Take the test, but be expected to put all that behind you and do well. No accord for the individual student and what is best for them.”

How should the results of high stakes testing be used?

- “I think of it as a piece of the puzzle. I think more weight should be placed into the benchmark testing that is a truer representation of a student's ability. I also think that attendance and parental involvement should be a large piece of the puzzle as well.”
- “They should be used as a guide. A short span of testing should not determine a child's future or a teacher's. There are SOOOO many variables that need to be accounted for that cannot be controlled. Therefore, since each child is an individual their progress should be individually assessed.”
- "It should be used as it was originally designed to target areas of need. Not evaluation.”
- “If we want to prepare children for the global economy- we need to rethink things again. I wonder what 75 million dollars given to the state of Rhode Island could of done for the students in terms of getting them technology to use and train teachers in innovative ways to use it? Instead it was used to develop a test that destroys self esteem and ignores other ways to show intelligence and strengths. We minimally train teachers in technology and then schools have none in the classrooms for teachers to use. Hence, wasted training. If we are trying to get children career ready- focus on technical schools, technology at the younger levels and properly training teachers and giving them the technology.”