

Action steps for better assessment: What you can do to help win the testing battle

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Although good assessment is complicated, and the problems of standardized testing seem endless, you don't need to be a testing expert to be an effective advocate for improved assessment. Here are some things anyone can do to help end the testing madness.

Learn about some of the issues around testing. The Fair Test web site (www.fairtest.org) is a fantastic resource for short, user-friendly fact sheets about a whole range of testing issues. Here are some examples:

[Racial Justice and Standardized Educational Testing](#)

[Paying Teachers for Student Test Scores Damages Schools and Undermines Learning](#)

[What's Wrong with Graduation and Promotion Tests](#)

[How Standardized Testing Damages Education](#)

Think about how testing has affected your life and/or the lives of your child or someone else you know. Testing is rarely a topic on the daily talk shows, and news stories about tests usually focus on data, not people. By talking about the issue with others, you will probably find that most people have strong feelings about testing. Briefly telling a personal story helps make the issue come alive for legislators, other policy makers, the media, and the general public.

Create a message for writing letters to the editor and contacting your legislators (see Tips p. 2).

Make your voice heard: When you see a story in the newspapers or online, don't just stew – speak up! Since you have a message already prepared, send it in.

Inform others: Talk about testing with your friends and family, share powerful articles on FaceBook and other online programs, Twitter good stories.

Hold a parent and/or community meeting where people can talk about testing, ask teachers to speak, invite the media (see FairTest's media toolkit http://fairtest.org/get_involved/media for pointers)

Tell your local, state and federal legislators what you think about the current national obsession with testing. Each level of government has some impact on testing.

Speaking to your legislators is most effective one-on-one, and all of them have local offices where they spend some time. Call that office to make an appointment to speak to your representative. Going with one or two other like-minded folks is even better. If your rep is not available, ask to speak to the aide most involved in education issues.

If you can't get to see your rep, the next best thing is to write a letter and snail mail or fax it. E-mail is OK but it usually will not receive the same attention as a personal visit or letter.

Join with others to learn more about the issues, share what you know, and take joint action.

- FairTest's Assessment Reform Network: http://fairtest.org/get_involved/k-12
- FairTest's online news group: <http://fairtest.org/arn+l.html>
- FairTest's online newsletter: <http://fairtest.org/signup>
- Parents Across America: <http://parentsacrossamerica.org/sign-up/>
- PURE News: http://pureparents.org/?page_id=40

p. 2 - Tips for creating an effective message to win the testing war

Be ready to speak up! Prepare your message carefully. It can include:

1) Your “elevator pitch” - a clear, one-sentence statement about what you support and what you oppose in assessment, short enough that you could use if you stepped into an elevator with somebody you wanted to influence. *For example:*

- “The best assessment happens throughout the year in the classroom by the teacher, not on one-shot standardized tests.”
- “Children need a well-rounded curriculum, but the emphasis on standardized testing these days has turned their education into test prep.”
- “There's just too much testing in our schools! Students need projects that challenge their higher-order thinking, not more standardized tests.”

2) A more detailed “letter to the editor” type of message. Practice! Write several! Ask friends or family to give you feedback. Ask your mom or a favorite teacher to edit it.

3) Something about your personal experience with testing, or a story about someone you know. Adding a personal story give your position a greater impact, especially when speaking with people who are less familiar with the issue.

4) Your “ask” - what do you want to see in place of more testing? *Here are some examples:*

- **Instead of one-shot tests, use multiple sources of evidence across all core subjects** to encourage a rich, varied and equitable curriculum for all students.
- **Create a balanced accountability system based on more than just test scores.** Hold schools and districts accountable for making changes that support school improvement, such as high-quality professional development and strong parental involvement.
- **Reduce the amount of mandated testing.** Scrap the requirement to test every child every year in grades three through eight. Allow sampling procedures for accountability purposes.

5) Facts to support your position. *For example:*

- Standardized tests can be biased and discriminatory. (see <http://fairtest.org/racial-justice-and-standardized-educational-testin>)
- Cheating on state tests has increased as the stakes become higher. (see <http://www.ajc.com/opinion/aps-cheating-scandal-reflects-1010190.html>)
- Schools and districts use standardized tests in ways the tests were not designed for, despite test makers' warnings. (<http://pureparents.org/data/files/complaintfinal12-06-10.pdf>, see pp. 8-11)
- Here are some facts about the problems with high-stakes testing in Chicago: <http://pureparents.org/data/files/Highstakes.pdf>