

Testimony to the Truancy in Chicago Pubic Schools Task Force

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Good afternoon. My name is Julie Woestehoff and I am the Executive Director of Parents United for Responsible Education, or PURE, a 26 year old parent-based public school advocacy organization.

Since 1996, the Chicago Public Schools has used various standardized tests as high-stakes measures first just for students, for their promotion after grades 3, 6 and 8, and, more recently as high-stakes measures for teacher, principal and school evaluation. My purpose in testifying here today is to share some concerns about the connection between the high-stakes testing and over-testing of our students and student motivation, truancy and drop out.

My comments today will highlight some points raised in three scholarly reports, and offer some recommendations.

The first report is the 2003 paper, “**The Effects of High-Stakes Testing on Student Motivation and Learning,**” by Audrey L. Amrein and David C. Berliner.

The authors pose the question “Do high-stakes testing policies lead to increased student motivation to learn? And do these policies lead to increased student learning? **No, according to four independent achievement measures.**”

They add, “The evidence shows that such tests actually decrease student motivation and increase the proportion of students who leave school early. Further, student achievement in the 18 high-stakes testing states has not improved on a range of measures, such as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, despite higher scores on the states' own assessment.”

“Researchers have found that when rewards and sanctions are attached to performance on tests, students become *less* intrinsically motivated to learn and less likely to engage in critical thinking...Attaching stakes to tests ...alienates students from their own learning experiences....”

Retention of student in Chicago has presented more specific data on the serious negative impact of high-stakes testing on students. “Researchers found that Chicago students retained before high school were 12 percent more likely to drop out before graduating.” In general, research shows that “retention motivates many students to leave school early.”

The second report is the 2000 study, “**High Stakes Testing and High School Completion,**” by Clarke, Haney and Madaus. The conclusion of this report is that “**high stakes testing programs are linked to decreased rates of high school completion.**”

Some of the report's finding:


- In schools with proportionately more students of low socio-economic status that used high stakes minimum competency test, early drop out rates – between eighth and tenth grades – were 4 to 6 percentage points higher than in schools that were similar but for the high-stakes test requirement.”
- Students who performed poorly on the Florida high school graduation tests were more likely to leave school, but that this relationship was affected by students' grades...for students with moderately good grades, failure on the test was associated with a significant increase in the likelihood of dropping out of school.
- Research findings in Texas suggest that because of the requirement that student pass graduation tests as well as other grade-level exit tests, some 40,000 of the state's 1993 sophomores dropped out of school.
- Research on the effects of grade retention has generally concluded that, at least beyond the early elementary grades, its harms outweigh its purported benefits, in particular, being overage for grade as a result of being held back eats away at students' sense of academic worth. The impact is especially severe for black students.

A third report is the 2000 “**What can Student Drawings Tell Us About High-Stakes Testing in Massachusetts?**” by Wheelock, Bebell and Haney. Their conclusion is that the majority of drawings portrayed students as “**anxious, angry, bored, pessimistic, or withdrawn from testing.**”

www.tcrecord.org/Gallery.asp?GalleryID=23&NAV=3

Anger and hostility

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Text Reads (top to bottom): (1) "I hate it!" (2) "How I felt during the test" Captions Read (left to right): (1) "How am I supposed to know?" (2) "I was never taught this!"

Recommendations:

■ **Stop the overuse of standardized tests**

PURE supports the annual limitation on the number of standardized academic achievement tests given to students as proposed in SB 2156.

The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), or the “Nation's Report Card,” tests students only in the “critical juncture” years of 4th, 8th and 11th grades, and tests only a sampling of students in those grades, with no stakes attached for students. Using NAEP's highly-respected testing schedule would help put the brakes on the massive expansion of testing that has hijacked our children's education.

Recommendation: Any large-scale statewide standardized testing system should be limited to sample testing in three benchmark years only.

■ **Stop the misuse of testing which violates professional and ethical standards**

Using any standardized achievement test for a purpose for which it was not designed violates nationally-accepted standards of the testing profession, of the state of Illinois and the U. S. Department of Education, and the guidelines of the test makers themselves (*see Attachment 2 – PURE Fact Sheet: “Testing professionals oppose use of standardized test scores as sole or primary measures in high-stakes decisions”*).

For example, according to the makers of the SAT-10, which CPS has been using to retain students:

Achievement test scores may certainly enter into a promotion or retention decision. However, they should be just one of the many factors considered and probably should receive less weight than factors such as teacher observation, day-to-day classroom performance, maturity level, and attitude.

But this has not stopped CPS from their inappropriate use of the Iowa test in the 1990's, then the ISAT/SAT 10 in recent years and, this year, the NWEA MAP. CPS also uses these tests in other ways for which they were not designed including school closing and turnaround decisions as well as teacher and principal evaluation.

CPS will say that it does use multiple measures to make promotion and other high-stakes decisions, but that is simply not true. In fact, the CPS promotion policy sets up multiple barriers, not multiple measures. That is, any one measure by itself will trigger the decision to send a student to summer school, and any one measure by itself can cause a student to flunk summer school and be retained. Test scores also vastly outweigh any other measure in the CPS school accountability system.

Recommendation: State law should prohibit the use of state tests in making high-stakes decisions about students.

■ Better ways to assess

There are far better ways to assess children that support rather than take time and resources away from teaching and learning, and that do not harm children the way test misuse and overuse harms them. Examples of successful use of such assessments include the New York Performance Standards Consortium. These schools involve students deeply in their own learning and assessment, and have better results.

Here's how FairTest describes the NYPSC system:

To “demonstrate college and career readiness and to qualify for graduation,” all Consortium programs require students to complete four performance-based assessment tasks (PBATs). These include an analytic essay, a social studies research paper, a science experiment, and an applied mathematics problem. They include both written and oral components.

The Consortium has permission from the state Department of Education to administer only one of the state graduation tests, English Language Arts. The PBATs, generally completed in 11th and 12th grades, replace the Regents exams in other subjects and for school accountability.

Education for the 21st Century explains that the PBATs “emerge from class readings and discussion. In some classes, the tasks are crafted by the teacher and in other instances by the student.” For example, in literature each student must write and then orally defend an analytic paper based on defined requirements. The report includes samples of the wide range of literature and interests addressed by the students, as well as similar samples for the other required tasks. In the oral defense for each PBAT, the student responds to questions from a panel of teachers and outside experts.

All the tasks and defenses completed for the common graduation requirement are evaluated using Consortium-wide rubrics. The report includes the scoring guides (“rubrics”) used to evaluate tasks and defenses. These well-developed assessment standards, written and revised as needed by Consortium teachers, allow accurate evaluations of student work across schools. Samples of the work are independently re-scored (“moderation”) to evaluate both reliability of scoring and the challenge level of teacher assignments.

To fulfill an NYC mandate for periodic assessments throughout the year in English language arts and math, the Consortium has developed tasks for its schools to use across the curriculum, including science and social studies. These help prepare students for the graduation assessments.

Each school maintains collections of work that chronicle a student's growth. The college persistence data show that the extensive reading, writing and long-term planning required for the performance assessments prepare students well for higher education.

The bottom line

The student population of the Consortium’s 26 public schools located in New York City mirrors the city’s student body (two schools are outside NYC). They have nearly identical shares of blacks, Latinos, English language learners and students with disabilities. However, the Consortium dropout rate is half that of NYC public schools. Graduation rates for all categories of students are higher than for the rest of NYC, while Consortium rates for ELLs and students with disabilities are nearly double the city’s.