

DO YOU KNOW THE TRUTH ABOUT HIGH-STAKES TESTING?

Sponsored by The New York Parents' Coalition to End High-Stakes Testing

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1. **Students in New York State public high schools are denied a graduation diploma if they fail just one high-stakes Regents test, regardless of their overall class performance.** Seniors will have to pass 4 high-stakes Regents exams this year in order to graduate. Next year, they will have to pass 5.
2. **Dropout rates in New York City have increased by 25% since the first Regents test was mandated for graduation in 1998-1999** (NYC Board of Education, Division of Assessment and Accountability, February 27, 2001). Dropout rates in some NYC high schools, especially those in neighborhoods with high poverty rates, exceed 50% (New York State Education Department, 2001).
3. **In an attempt to raise state test scores, rich and stimulating curricula throughout New York State schools have been replaced with dull and repetitious test preparation.** Schools and teachers are compelled to make these changes, against their professional judgment (*NY Times*, April 13, 2001; *Times Union Albany*, May 8, 2001; *Education Week*, June 13, 2001). Moreover, music and art classes and recess have been cut or shortened across the state to accommodate test prep drills.
4. **High schools with proven records of success have been told by the New York State Education Department to abandon their nationally recognized programs in favor of Regents testing.** The schools in the New York Performance Standards Consortium have higher college attendance rates (91% vs. 63%) and lower dropout rates (9.9% vs. 19.3%) than the New York City average, yet the State refuses to acknowledge the validity of their performance-based assessment system.
5. **A growing number of teachers in New York City are refusing to teach the fourth grade, saying that they cannot bear the pressure of preparing students for the high-stakes state tests that have become a defining feature of that grade** (*NY Times*, June 14, 2001). Fourth-grade teachers additionally report that the intense, often single-minded focus on testing has been taking an emotional toll on their students by intolerably increasing their stress levels (*NY Times*, June 14, 2001). Students are vomiting, crying, and exhibiting other stress-related behaviors prior to and during test administration.
6. **There is growing concern that the New York State Education Department is manipulating test scores to get its desired results.** For example, "to meet state standards" at grade level in math this year, 8th graders had to achieve a much higher minimum score on the 8th grade test than 4th graders had to achieve on the 4th grade test, and Commissioner Mills admitted that the bar was deliberately set high for the 8th grade (*NY Times*, October 24, 2001). In high school, however, students only needed to answer correctly 45% of the questions on the June 2001 Math A Regents exam to receive passing grades (*Buffalo News*, July 17, 2001).

7. **Scores of research studies point to the harmful effects of high-stakes testing.** Robert L. Linn, national testing expert and consultant to the New York State Department of Education, recently concluded a study review of high-stakes testing with the statement, “As someone who has spent his entire career doing research, writing, and thinking about educational testing and assessment issues, I would like to conclude by summarizing a compelling case showing that the major uses of tests for student and school accountability during the past 50 years have improved education and student learning in dramatic ways. Unfortunately, that is not my conclusion. Instead, I am led to conclude that the unintended negative effects of high-stakes accountability uses [of tests] often outweigh the intended positive effects” (*Educational Researcher*, March, 2000).
8. **No single test measures a student’s true performance.** Every standardized test has a margin of error (American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association & National Council on Measurement in Education, Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing, 1999). Testing companies therefore advise states and school districts NOT to make decisions regarding grade promotion and graduation based on a single test. The New York State Commissioner of Education and his Board of Regents have set policy in direct violation of this recommendation.
9. **Scoring errors by CTB McGraw-Hill, a testing company, have wreaked havoc with students’ lives.** In New York City, 9000 students were erroneously assigned to summer school in 1999 (*Daily News*, September 22, 1999), and in 2001, scoring errors delayed the release of the New York State 8th graders’ exam results (*NY Times*, October 2, 2001). Board of Regents member Charlotte Frank is a vice president of The McGraw-Hill Companies. CTB McGraw-Hill, a division of The McGraw-Hill Companies, has a multi-million dollar contract with the New York State Education Department.
10. **A panel of university English and writing professors, under the auspices of the Rockefeller Foundation, reviewed recent English Language Arts Regents exams and concluded that they “do not identify a student’s readiness for college-level work,”** and that critical thinking, literature, and writing were poorly served by the test (*Regents Exam Review Panel*, June 7, 2001).
11. **National polls indicate that 65% of the public believes that student achievement is best measured by classroom work and homework, not standardized tests** (2001 *Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup Survey*). Moreover, the American public believes “high parental involvement” and “children who are happy and like school” are the best indicators that schools are providing a high quality education, not “high scores on statewide tests” (2001 *AASA Poll*).
12. **New York State students in independent, private schools are not required to take and pass the Regents exams in order to graduate.** In fact, these schools refuse to administer the Regents exams because they would be forced to teach toward these tests and to abandon their own rich curricula (*NY Times*, November 24, 1999). Board of Regents member Merryl Tisch, a policy maker who is insistent that public school children take the Regents exams, sends her children to an independent, private school.