High Stakes Testing

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What Is High Stakes Testing?

Test outcomes that are used to make important, life-altering decisions.

- Decisions include:
  - Denial of school diploma
  - Repetition of a grade
  - Labeling of students
  - Withholding of funds
Why Is It Important?

- Measures children’s knowledge about what they have learned.
- Determines whether or not a child will be promoted to the next grade level.
- Schools are penalized for students and staff not being adequately prepared for the test and scoring well on them.
The Controversy

- Kids in America are faced with penalties for performing poorly on tests.

- The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was passed in 2002 by President George W. Bush.

- Made it mandatory for all 50 states to participate in standardized testing.

- Held states more accountable for student performance.
The Controversy

Many people argue over the NCLB Act.

Some arguments included:

- Some students aren’t very good test takers, but do well in school.
- One test shouldn’t determine whether or not a student passes a particular grade level.
- Undermines public schools
- Schools are penalized for not meeting proficiency.
- All students are testing on the same level, regardless of their abilities.
Examples of High Stakes Testing

- **Standardized testing**
  - Arkansas Benchmark Exam
  - Missouri Assessment Program

- **College Entrance Exams**
  - ACT
  - SAT

- **Job Interviews**

- **Drug Tests**
  - Athletes on performance enhancing drugs
    - Steroids
  - Criminals suspected to be on drugs
    - Illegal drugs (i.e. Cocaine)
Pros of High Stakes Testing

- Provide students, parents, and teachers, as well as educators, reformers, policymakers and administrators, with feedback on students’ educational performance and progress.

- The higher the stakes are, the more thoroughly the tests are developed, monitored and researched.

- Without tests, students can go through high school exerting little effort and still graduate.

- Show what students know and where they need to improve.

- Give both parents and teachers a sense of how students are doing individually and in comparison to others.
Cons of High Stakes Testing

- Students leave school either because they get discouraged or because they are unable to pass the tests.

- Causes an increased level of anxiety and stress for the student.

- Some believe that the scores that students receive on these tests reflect more on the education and wealth of a student’s family than on their academic achievement.

- May contribute to curriculum narrowing, which is spending time only on areas that are on the tests, not on subjects that aren’t.

- May contain bias to certain racial groups.
  - English Language Learners
Top Five Test Taking Strategies for Students

1. Keep a positive attitude throughout the whole test and try to stay relaxed. If you start to feel nervous take a few deep breaths to relax.

2. Do the easiest problems first. Don't stay on a problem that you are stuck on, especially when time is a factor.

3. Pace yourself, don't rush. Read the entire question and pay attention to the details.

4. Always read the whole question carefully. Don't make assumptions about what the question might be.

5. If you have time left when you are finished, look over your test. Make sure that you have answered all the questions. Watch out for careless mistakes and proofread your answers.
How Can Students Prepare?

- Get a good nights rest the night before
  - At least 8-10 hours
    - No technology or electronics before bed.

- Eat a good breakfast the morning of the test.
  - Eat brain-powering foods
    - Protein-rich foods: nuts, eggs, and yogurt
    - Fruits: apples, oranges, bananas
    - Whole grain cereals

- Make sure they come with at least two No. 2 pencils.
What Can You Do As Educators to Ensure Your Students are Prepared for High Stakes Testing?

- Set goals for the students and informal assessments to monitor his or her progress.
  - Set short-term and long term goals.

- Teachers actively engage students in authentic literacy activities so that they become capable readers and writers.

- Teaching them how to read and answer test items.
  - Teaching them to fill in the bubble to mark their answer.

- Having them take practice tests to sharpen their test-taking strategies.
  - Take practice tests that are almost identical to the format of the standardized test.
References

- High Stakes Testing-Education.com
- Research Center: No Child Left Behind
- High Stakes Testing in the Classroom
- Brainfuel: What to Eat Before the Exam
- Preparing for Standardized Tests
- Test Taking Tips