

# Excessive High-Stakes Testing Has Negative Effects on Students, Teachers

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## BACKGROUND

- ▶ No Child Left Behind (NCLB) has shifted the focus away from student learning toward mandated standardized testing and has created a culture of high-stakes testing whereby too many teachers are evaluated based on students' test scores. Both the amount of standardized testing and the high stakes associated with such testing have taken a toll on teachers' morale.
- ▶ NEA is calling for the next version of ESEA to clearly reduce the amount of mandated standardized testing and to divorce high-stakes accountability from testing.
- ▶ NEA Research collected phone survey data from 1500 of our PK-12 teacher members during the fall of 2013 in order to gauge their perceptions of standardized testing and its impacts on their work. We also collected separate samples of 900 from each of three states – California, Florida, and Tennessee. Our results support the position that we should reduce the amount of mandated standardized testing and decouple high-stakes accountability from testing.

## KEY FINDINGS

**Teachers spend a significant portion of their instructional time on preparing students to take tests, but they reported little time actually using the test results in a meaningful way to improve instruction.**

- ▶ Teachers nationwide who taught classes in which students took a state standardized test in 2012-13 spent an average of the equivalent of 54 school days, or 29% of their total work time for the school year, on tasks related to that testing.
- ▶ Of those 54 school days, an equivalent of about 39 days was spent on preparing students to take the test, and fewer than two days were spent reviewing results with students or parents.

**Teachers reported feeling considerable pressure, particularly from administrators, to improve test scores.**

- ▶ Nearly three-quarters (72%) of our teacher members surveyed reported feeling moderate or extreme pressure from school and district administrators to improve test scores.

**Teachers who experienced increased pressure (from school and district administrators in particular, but also from other teachers and parents) were more likely to express three perceptions about testing:**

- 1) Standardized testing has a negative impact on their classrooms
  - 2) They spend too much time on standardized testing
  - 3) Their evaluations depend to a moderate or extreme degree on student test scores.
- ▶ Although 41% of surveyed teachers reported that the emphasis on improving standardized test scores had a negative impact on their classrooms, only 14% reported a positive impact.
  - ▶ More than half (51%) of our surveyed members reported having spent too much time on standardized testing.

- ▶ Nearly half (42%) of surveyed members reported that their school placed moderate or extreme emphasis on students' test scores to evaluate their performance.

The combination of these three negative perceptions contributes to two indicators of low morale:

1) Lower job satisfaction

2) A greater likelihood that teachers consider leaving the profession due to testing

- ▶ Seventy percent of surveyed teachers reported feeling satisfied with their jobs, but satisfaction was lower among those holding more negative perceptions of testing.
- ▶ Despite this high level of overall satisfaction, nearly half (44%) of surveyed members had considered leaving the profession because of standardized testing.

A comparison of three states, each with a sample of 900 teachers, revealed large differences in both opinions about testing and in teacher morale. Two of the states (Florida and Tennessee) had mandated the use of test scores for teacher evaluations and the third state (California) did not. Teachers in the states with mandates reported:

1) More negative feelings about testing

2) Much lower job satisfaction, and

3) Much higher percentage thought of leaving the profession due to testing

- ▶ In states with mandates, the percent of teachers who reported “a lot” or “extreme” pressure from school administrators to improve test scores were 57% and 58%, while in the state without mandates it was 34%.
- ▶ In the two states with mandates, those reporting being satisfied or very satisfied with their jobs was 57% and 51% as compared to 79% in the state without mandates.
- ▶ In the states with mandates, 61% and 67% of teachers reported having thought of leaving the profession due to testing as compared to 27% in the state without mandates.