

The Delran Education Association’s Position on High-Stakes Standardized Testing

We, the members of the Delran Education Association, believe that authentic, teacher-created assessments are an important component of any successful instructional program. However, we stand in defiant opposition to the New Jersey Department of Education’s obsession with the use of high-stakes standardized testing, both in our own district and in districts across this state.

We believe that...	We oppose high-stakes standardized tests because...
learning should be a joyful experience that embraces various learning styles, talents, strengths, and intelligences.	such tests ignore individual learning styles--and are designed instead to assess all students in the same way.
learning should be a challenging yet rewarding experience.	such tests set students and districts up for failure in part through the setting of arbitrary cut scores that pre-determines how many students are intended to fail the assessments.
learning should be assessed in an authentic way, in which students are asked to complete real-world tasks that demonstrate meaningful applications of knowledge and skills.	such tests ask students to complete tasks that are neither age appropriate nor do they adequately assess meaningful real-world knowledge or skills.
teachers should have the autonomy to design lessons that will accommodate their students’ individual needs.	such tests, and the instructional methodologies that accompany them, create a dull, punitive, and submissive learning environment that stifles learning and creativity in both students and teachers.
learning should be assessed through the use of teacher-created assessments for the immediate purpose of determining students’ academic progress and tailoring of individual instruction.	such tests are not created by teachers, but corporate entities whose goal is not to improve student learning or instruction, but to promote the sale of additional “support materials” to cash-strapped school districts who find themselves (by design) on the failing side of arbitrary cut scores.
students should be assessed by their classroom teachers, so those trained and certified professionals may make necessary and appropriate adjustments to improve student outcomes.	such tests are neither scored nor seen by educators. They offer neither immediate feedback nor any useful feedback in the long-term. There is no practical way to use these tests for the immediate enhancement, or adjustment, of instruction.

<p>students learn best when they are not labeled as failures, as early as in the third grade, based on a single test score. Likewise, districts thrive when they have the ability to rely upon the creativity and professionalism of their staff in the design and implementation of instruction and assessment.</p>	<p>such tests are both physiologically and psychologically harmful to students, to teachers, and to public education in general. By design, they are intended to label both students and schools as failures.</p>
<p>academic success is best measured over a significant period of time utilizing multiple measures of student learning.</p>	<p>such tests measure a very narrowly-defined type of intelligence and academic achievement. Testing provides a singular snapshot into the “academic” life of a student and by no means shows the progress or potential of the whole child.</p>
<p>academic success is fostered by teachers and administrators who encourage and support risk-taking in both teaching and in learning. It is these things that allow students to reach their full potential.</p>	<p>such tests destroy student confidence and academic engagement by labeling students as failures at a very early age.</p>
<p>students of all socioeconomic backgrounds can be successful academically when paired with caring educational professionals who provide opportunities to all their students.</p>	<p>such tests accurately predict one thing: household income and access to educational resources. They are designed to punish and label students who do not have access to these resources at a very early age. These tests continue to place an unfair educational obstacles in the way of families who already face economic ones.</p>
<p>technological resources that are used to enhance instruction or to develop useful, marketable skills are an important part of the educational process.</p>	<p>such tests require the purchasing or massive amounts of technology for the sole purpose of utilizing this technology for testing, not classroom instruction. Keyboarding is beginning as early as kindergarten in classrooms (and retro-fitted libraries) across the state, simply to prepare children for testing.</p>
<p>the rate at which children grow and develop varies widely; children must be allowed to learn at their own pace.</p>	<p>such tests purport to determine college or career readiness as early as the 3rd grade. There is no statistically accurate means of doing so.</p>
<p>it is only when we educate the whole child that we can prepare children for their future, no matter which path they choose in life. No child should have his/her career choice obstructed by his/her performance on a standardized test.</p>	<p>such tests are being set aside by post-secondary institutions across the nation, as those institutions have begun to accept that the SAT, the ACT, and other types of high-stakes test are NOT accurate predictors of student success at the college level beyond, perhaps, a student’s first semester.</p>
<p>school districts operate best when decisions about testing, instruction,</p>	<p>such tests are designed by for-profit corporations and supported by a</p>

and spending are made by their own school boards in consultation with the stakeholders in their communities.	Department of Education that cares little for the availability of local resources, or the right for districts to determine what educational values they would like their students to develop.
student privacy is supremely important; secure and sensitive information should only be shared with parent consent and only when it is absolutely necessary to benefit the child.	the private corporations behind this push for more testing are sharing personal information - beyond what is reasonable or necessary - in order to turn families into consumers of educational products and services that they never would have needed had their children not been labeled as “failing” by these tests.
students who are struggling to learn the English language and students who have special learning needs should be assessed when and how it is most appropriate, not based on some arbitrary testing schedule.	such tests force all students to fit into one vision of “success”-- with little regard for a student’s language proficiency, or the appropriateness of assessing career readiness for children who are being taught life skills as the primary focus of their IEP.
the students that we teach are not standardized and should not be taught or assessed using a high-stakes standardized methodology. We don’t teach them that way - we would never presume to assess them that way.	such tests do a disservice all of our students - both “good” test takers and “bad” ones - many of whom struggle with stress and anxiety as a direct result of the pressure that these tests place on them.

The Background

The erroneous claim that the American public school system was failing first came about in April of 1983 with the release of the report “[A Nation At Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform.](#)” Then-Secretary of Education T. H. Bell had created a “National Commission on Excellence in Education” and had directed its members to report on the quality of education in the United States. This report claimed, for example, that secondary school curricula had “been homogenized...to the point that they no longer [had] a central purpose” and that “minimum competency examinations...tend to become the maximum, thus lowering educational standards for all.” In its recommendations, the commission called for “standardized tests of achievement..as part of a nationwide (but not Federal) system of State and local standardized tests.”

And so it began.

Standardized tests have been part of our nation's educational landscape for decades, and until recently, they were used primarily as low-stakes and anecdotal measures of student achievement. In recent years, and beginning primarily with the No Child Left Behind Act, however, high-stakes standardized testing has become one of the most prominent features of our public education system. The shift from teaching and learning to testing and punishing was clearly stated by then-president George W. Bush when [he said](#):

"The philosophy behind the law [NCLB] is pretty straightforward: Local schools remain under local control. In exchange for federal dollars, however, we expect results. We're spending money on schools, and shouldn't we determine whether or not the money we're spending is yielding the results society expects? So states set standards. One reason this school makes sense is because you have a principal who sets high standards, keeps that bar high. And we hold schools accountable for meeting the standards. There -- we set an historic goal, and that is to -- every child should learn to read and do math at grade level by 2014. The key to measuring is to test. And by the way, I've heard every excuse in the book why we should not test -- oh, there's too many tests; you teach the test; testing is intrusive; testing is not the role of government. How can you possibly determine whether a child can read at grade level if you don't test? And for those who claim we're teaching the test, uh-uh. We're teaching a child to read so he or she can pass the test." (January 8, 2009)

There are many problems with George W. Bush's statement, beginning with the false claim that "local schools remain under local control." In reality, local schools are forced to adopt standards, like the Common Core, and testing, like the PARCC, that directly connect to unfunded state and federal mandates. Another problem with his statement relates to "teaching to the test." When the success or failure of a school depends upon the outcomes of its students on a particular test, teaching to the test is likely to be the end result. Administrators who fear having their schools labeled as failures are likely to ensure that teachers were "test prepping" rather than teaching, and teachers who fear for their jobs are likely to follow along with these misguided administrative directives. The only "teaching" that would occur in such scenarios would likely be directly related to testing - not to learning.

On September 24, 2009, Secretary of Education [Arne Duncan said](#): "NCLB helped expand the standards and accountability movement. Today, we expect districts, principals and teachers to take responsibility for the academic performance of their schools and students. We can never let up on holding everyone accountable for student success. That is what we are all striving for." Clearly, the goal of NCLB was accountability, not learning. Again, if all that matters is accountability, all that will occur in schools and individual classrooms will be teaching to the test. Educational professionals can, and should, be held accountable for their classroom performance--but this can be done in a multitude of

ways without requiring students to submit to hours upon hours of standardized testing for the purpose of creating data points with which their teachers and principals can then be “held accountable” for.

Most recently, [Race to the Top](#), President Obama’s education initiative first announced in July 2009, called for “every American student to graduate from high school prepared for college and for a career...as a national imperative.” Once again, the irresponsible implication that America’s public schools were not serving the needs of its students reared its ugly head, and with it, a call for four key objectives-- the first of which is the most important for this discussion: “Higher standards and better assessments that will prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace”. So American political leaders - most of whom who had never been educators themselves - had determined that the solution to America’s supposed “education problem” was more testing. This was to be combined with “smarter data systems to measure student growth and success, and help educators improve instruction--” yet none of these initiatives have been proven to have had a direct, positive impact on student learning in the classroom.

The Transition from NJASK/HSPA to PARCC

In order to fulfill Race to the Top mandates, New Jersey--like many other states in the nation--adopted the Common Core State Standards and agreed to administer accompanying Common Core-aligned tests. This year, children in New Jersey’s public schools are scheduled to take Common Core-aligned PARCC tests in lieu of the NJASK and HSPA (since Acting Commissioner Hespe has suddenly and [publicly](#) questioned the [validity of these tests](#), which he helped to [first implement](#)). Given that [other states](#) that have already administered Common Core-aligned tests have seen sharp declines in passing rates, and given that NJ Department of Education Assistant Commissioner [Bari Erlichson](#) has suggested that she expects a drop in passing rates on the PARCC, our already-existing concerns about high-stakes standardized testing, which are detailed below, have been renewed.

Is the Delran Education Association simply against all forms of testing?

It is important to acknowledge that most public school students encounter many different types of standardized tests over the course of their K-12 experiences—and we believe that the primary question we should ask ourselves, when passing judgment about a particular test, is **whether or not the test directly benefits the students who take it and whether the test is elective or is imposed on students and families as a state or federal mandate.**

For instance, many students **elect** to take standardized assessments like the PSAT/NMSQT, SAT, ACT, and Advanced Placement tests because the results of those tests can directly benefit students in various ways. (With the cost of college rising exponentially, for example, students who are successful at passing AP exams may be able to earn college credit before they leave high school.) While we wholeheartedly support families' rights to choose which tests are appropriate for their children, we remain concerned about the extent to which non-educators are shaping standardized testing in general. (For instance, [David Coleman](#), the chief architect of the Common Core, is also president of the College Board--the organization responsible for the SATs and the Advanced Placement program.)

Our Concerns with Standardized Testing in General

- While proponents of annual standardized testing claim such assessments are necessary to determine what and how much [children are learning](#), these tests offer little or no feedback to teachers and families. Teachers aren't allowed to see test questions, the results come back too late to offer an opportunity to adjust instruction or provide guidance for student placement. In short, there is nothing a standardized test can tell us that classroom teachers do not know even shortly after a school year begins.
- Under Race to the Top, standardized test scores are used primarily to [rate children, teachers, and schools](#). This practice is short-sighted and destroys both student and teacher morale.
- The current era of standardized testing is accompanied by unprecedented [data-tracking initiatives](#) that [compromise student privacy](#). We believe that families should determine what information they are comfortable sharing about themselves and their children.
- Educators are forced to devote an increasing amount of time to standardized testing, which replaces more meaningful teaching and learning. The time not spent testing is often spent teaching test-related skills for the sake of improving test scores, not to improve teaching or learning.
- It has been proven time and again that standardized tests primarily measure a family's [income](#)--and that results on such tests are greatly influenced by factors outside of school.
- High-stakes tests offer a very narrow and very specific definition of intelligence and/or academic achievement. We don't believe that any child should be defined by a test score--even the students who excel on tests. There's more to a student's portfolio than a test score.

- College and Career readiness is a vague, ill-defined term; do standardized tests and the programs districts implement to facilitate success on standardized tests prepare students for vocational careers? Do they facilitate or measure life skills? Can any of this be determined in the third grade?
- Because test security is of supreme importance to testing corporations and because teachers are often required to sign confidentiality agreements which stipulate that they will not look at or discuss the tests, we have no choice but to [question the validity and construction](#) of the standardized tests our children take--and whether such tests stifle and/or prevent teacher advocacy.
- The scoring process is problematic, and high-stakes decisions often rest in the hands of scorers who earned their positions by responding to [Craigslis](#) or [Kelly Services](#) solicitations. Such scorers generally do not need to have a background in education and do not need to demonstrate their own proficiency in writing. Worse yet, to add to their bottom lines, many testing companies are resorting to computerized scoring of student writing. That is too absurd to give any more attention to here.
- Given that it is virtually impossible to determine how many scoring and test-construction errors go unnoticed, it is particularly concerning that Pearson, the corporation that creates and scores the PARCC exam, has a [decades-long history of errors](#). Tests, then, that are being used to label students, teachers, and entire school systems as successes or failures, cannot be trusted to do so responsibly.
- Standardized tests are created by corporations whose primary goal is profit-making, and in taking these tests, students are becoming [unwitting subjects of commercial advertising](#) for products like Barbies and iPods. Parents of children who do not “meet the standards” as indicated by these test scores will ultimately be targeted by marketing agencies for test-prep materials and services.
- Taxpayers are burdened with the costs of [unfunded mandates](#), like Common Core and PARCC, that have been imposed on districts. With local boards of education trying to keep costs down but still provide state-of-the-art instructional programs, how many more unfunded mandates (or the technological needs that accompany them) can districts endure?
- These unfunded mandates have forced districts to cut programs (arts, vocational programs, extracurricular activities) and personnel in the name of standardized testing. Testing has become the focus of public education. Student well-being, student well-roundedness, and support from educational professionals - real, live human beings who work alongside our neediest students - have been sacrificed to fund these mandates.
- Anything that is being done explicitly to facilitate the passage of a test is inauthentic and should not be part of a child’s education. Anyone who has been around education for long enough can tell the difference between authentic learning and activities that are being done simply for the sake of improving test scores. These phony assessments are bad for children.

Our Concerns with Standardized Testing as it Relates to our Students

Though virtually all of the concerns listed above directly and negatively affect students, below is a more specific list of problems our students will encounter as a result of an over-reliance on high-stakes tests.

- Learning should be a joyful process and should foster creativity, curiosity, and risk-taking, but standardized testing hinders those things.
- An over-reliance on flawed standardized tests sends the dangerous message to our children that the only things that are worth learning are those that are tested.
- Standardized tests tend to be problematic for [students with special needs](#), many of whom will be required to pass the same tests as general-education students despite their identified learning disabilities.
- High-stakes tests are inherently unfair to [English language learners](#), who many times are required to achieve passing scores that are equivalent to those of their native English-speaking counterparts.
- High-stakes tests discriminate against socioeconomically-disadvantaged students, many of whom do not have access to the technology at home that their wealthier peers do. They also are less likely to be able to afford out-of-school tutoring that is available to their wealthier counterparts.
- High-stakes tests have disproportionate and negative effects on [minorities](#), and such tests have actually [widened the achievement gap](#) that exists between white students and students of color.
- Child psychologists and pediatricians are reporting increasing numbers of children, including very high-achievers, who present with [anxiety disorders](#) that stem from the high stakes attached to standardized testing.
- Children whose schools promote and endorse test-prep are more likely to be taught by young, inexperienced teachers whose primary goal is to [raise test scores](#).
- [Reformers predict and celebrate high failure rates, but students believe that if they cannot pass high-stakes standardized tests, they are failures.](#) A single snapshot of a student's performance should not be used in isolation—without other factors—to make placement decisions or to label a child as “college or career ready.”
- Our youngest children--even [kindergarteners](#)--are being robbed of experiences that do not promote “college and career readiness.” As Finnish education expert Pasi Sahlberg notes, “children must play.”

Our Concerns with Standardized Testing as it Relates to our Teachers

- Test scores are largely affected by factors beyond teachers' control: attendance, health factors, the extent to which a child's family values and stresses academics, class size, students with special needs, length of time students have been in district/how frequently their family moves, etc.
- It is unreasonable to suggest that teachers whose jobs depend on their students' standardized test scores should not teach to tests--especially when it's been proven that [test-prep is effective](#) in helping students pass standardized tests. (This is why programs like Princeton Review, Kaplan, and Barron's, which teach test-taking skills as opposed to content and critical thinking skills, are sought after by the most competitive students.)
- It is inherently unfair to evaluate some teachers (those who teach tested grades and subjects like English and math) and not others; such a practice breeds resentment among teachers and discourages aspiring teachers from entering the profession.
- Evaluating teachers using student test scores encourages teachers to think about students in terms of the test scores they'll produce: who gets the gifted students? who gets the lower-achieving students? who gets small class sizes? Scheduling issues alone will pit teachers against one another.
- Standardized test-based teacher evaluation hinders collaboration and turns teaching into a competition; this type of climate is damaging to school environments and to students. (This is an inevitable result of a program that inherently promotes cutthroat competition: Race to the Top.)
- Teachers' creative licenses are stifled when they're compelled to "teach to the test" so students know what to expect on high-stakes tests.
- Student scores can be [affected](#) by teachers in disciplines other than those being tested; for example, students with the same math teacher might have two different chemistry teachers, and those chemistry teachers might teach math differently. The same goes for language arts; students with the same English teacher might have two different history teachers—one of whom requires more writing than the other.
- There's not enough research to show that measuring teacher effectiveness using test scores even works; in fact, there's much research to [show the opposite](#).
- Some students, regardless of the quality and efforts of the teacher in the front of the room, are simply unwilling to learn.
- Problems with test consistency: a 150 (theoretical score on a theoretical test) on a 3rd grade test and a 150 on a 4th grade test often don't mean the same thing; it is virtually impossible to create tests that sequentially measure the same level of learning on a consistent basis. This is especially true for language arts tests, which are largely subjective.

- SGP designer Damian Betebenner cautions that his system is [not meant to evaluate teachers/help districts make personnel decisions](#) and notes that it does not [provide an explanation for the cause of growth](#).
- Seemingly-proportional gains in a student's raw scores [do not mean the same thing at all score points](#)—so SGPs oversimplify supposed gains and incorrectly decree that a ten-point gain at any score point, for example, means the same thing for all students.
- Ultimately, it is impossible to determine teachers' effectiveness by using a system that is inherently flawed, imprecise, and counterproductive to the efforts of educators.

Summation and Resolutions

Given the overwhelming concerns that we have about New Jersey's overemphasis on high-stakes testing, given that the study commission established by Governor Christie for the purpose of studying the implementation of Common Core and PARCC has not been assembled yet (even though its initial report is due December 31, 2014), and given that America has a history of enacting failed educational reforms that result in more harm to children than good, we can no longer stand idly by, close our classroom doors, and simply do what the State of New Jersey is directing us to do without offering some kind of responsible resistance in defense of our children and their education.

As a result, the membership of the Delran Education Association has resolved to take the following actions:

- We will REFUSE to remain silent about the damage high stakes standardized testing is doing to our children and their teachers.
- We will REFUSE to support educational decisions that restrict entry into a particular course or educational program based on a test score alone.
- We will REFUSE to endorse directives--many of which are assigned by administrators who feel pressure from the State to raise test scores--that require us to "teach to the test."
- We will REFUSE to condone abusive "sit and stare" policies which punish children whose parents refuse testing on their children's behalf.
- We will REFUSE to label our students or tell them that they cannot succeed in college or in a career of their choice based upon the scores that they receive on high-stakes standardized tests.
- We will REFUSE to perpetuate the misinformation coming from the State Department of Education that 95% of the student population must take these tests or districts will face financial retribution.

- We will SUPPORT parents who do not want to be coerced into agreeing to testing under the threat of the withholding of state or federal funding by educating them about [NCLB waivers](#) and [AYP \(Adequate Yearly Progress\)](#).
- We will SUPPORT parents who oppose high-stakes standardized test by directing them to the tools that they will need to opt-out or refuse such tests on behalf of their children.
- We will SUPPORT parents who decide that these tests are the right choice for their children by administering these tests as directed by our administrators.
- We will SUPPORT collaborative and community-wide discussions about how to implement educational policies that are good for children and how to eliminate ones that are not.
- We will SUPPORT all of the children in our care by educating them according to their individual needs--regardless of their performance on a standardized test.
- We will SUPPORT and encourage meaningful methods of teacher evaluation that include observation, dialogue, and administrative support.
- We will SUPPORT local boards of education who determine to respect parental rights by encouraging them to establish responsible student-centered, proactive educational policies like the ones enacted in [Bloomfield](#), [Highland Park](#), [Wayne](#), [Washington Township](#), [Ridgewood](#), [Fair Lawn](#), and [Hopewell Valley](#).

Resolved this 10th day of November, 2014 by the Executive Committee of the Delran Education Association.

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