

**Reference Desk Response No. 429:
Effects of State-Mandated Standardized Tests on Curriculum**

Question:

1. What are the effects on curriculum when a state mandates that all students must take a standardized test?
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Report:

Following an established REL-NEI Reference Desk research protocol, we conducted a search for research reports as well as descriptive and policy-oriented briefs and articles in this area. The sources included federally funded organizations, additional research institutions, several educational research databases, and a general Internet search using Google and other search engines. We also searched for appropriate organizations that may act as resources on this issue. We have not done an evaluation of these organizations or the resources themselves, but offer this list to you for your information only.

Our researchers have found that teachers in states with high stakes for students "...tend to invest more time on instruction in tested areas and less on instruction in non-core subject areas (e.g. fine arts, physical education, foreign languages, industrial/vocational education)" (Pedulla, 2003; see resource below). The influence of state testing programs on teachers' instructional practices is "more closely related to the stakes for students than those for schools" (Pedulla, 2003; see resource below). In addition, "the impact of testing programs is generally stronger in elementary and middle schools than in high schools." (Moses, 2007; see resource below)

Other researchers agree with the finding that teachers report giving greater attention to tested content areas. Their findings contend that "...state standards have impacted teachers' instruction, particularly with regard to the content focus of daily lessons." (Abrams 2003; see resource below)

Question:

1. **What are the effects on curriculum when a state mandates that all students must take a standardized test?**

1.1. Perceived Effects of State-Mandated Testing Programs on Teaching and Learning:

Findings from a National Survey of Teachers. *Pedulla, J., Abrams, L., Madaus, G., Russell, M., Ramos, M., & Miao, J.; 2003; National Board on Education Testing and Public Policy; 151 pp; ERIC Document # ED481836.*

Source: ERIC

(http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/1b/80/96.pdf)

According to the abstract, "Results from a national survey of teachers are reported for five types of state testing programs.... At least two themes emerged from these survey data. In several areas, teachers' responses differ significantly when analyzed by the severity of the stakes attached to test results. Pressure on teachers, emphasis on test preparation, time devoted to test content, and views on accountability are such areas. The second theme is that views of elementary, middle, and high school teachers regarding the effects of their state's test differed from each other in areas such as school climate and classroom use of test results. There are also

instances in which stakes and grade level combined show interesting patterns in teachers' responses, and areas in which there are no differences.”

1.2. Views from the Classroom: Teachers' Opinions of Statewide Testing Programs. *Abrams, L., Pedulla, J., Madaus, G.; 2003; Theory Into Practice; Vol. 42; No. 1; pp. 18-29; ISSN #: 00405841.*
Source: Internal Search Database

(http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_into_practice/v042/42.1abrams.pdf)

According to the abstract: “This article discusses teachers’ views on state-mandated testing programs. An overview of the literature is presented, as well as results from a nationwide survey of teachers. Findings from both suggest that high-stakes state-mandated testing programs can lead to instruction that contradicts teachers’ views of sound educational practice. In particular, teachers frequently report that the pressure to raise test scores encourages them to emphasize instructional and assessment strategies that mirror the content and format of the state test, and to devote large amounts of classroom time to test preparation activities. The article concludes that serious reconsideration must be given to the use of high-stakes consequences in current statewide testing programs.”

1.3. The Testing Culture and the Persistence of High Stakes Testing Reforms. *Moses, M. and Nanna, M.; 2007; Education and Culture; Vol. 23 (1); pp. 55-72; ISSN #: 10854908.*

Source: Internal Search Database

(<http://epicpolicy.org/files/Brief-MosesNanna.pdf>)

According to the abstract: “The article outlines the policy context for high stakes examinations, as well as the ideas of testing and accountability as major tenets of current education reform and policy. In partial explanation of the widespread acceptance and use of standardized tests in the United States, [the authors argue] that there is a pervasive testing culture, in addition to other contributing factors such as administrative utility, profit motives, and political ideology.”

Additional Resources to Consult

- **Effects of Standardized Testing on Teachers and Learning: Another Look.** *Herman, J.L., Golan, S. 1990. National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards and Student Testing (CRESST), UCLA Graduate School of Education; ERIC #: ED341738.*
Source: ERIC
(http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/23/be/63.pdf)
This study surveys 341 teachers in 9 states about the amount and type of test preparation in the classroom and school, the impact of testing on non-tested subjects, and the impact of testing on teacher pride and professionalism. According to the abstract: “Results indicate that testing does influence the teaching and learning within schools. Substantial time and attention are devoted to assuring that students are taught tested objectives and given practice in test content. Schools send messages to their teachers about the importance of test curriculum alignment, and teachers design instruction with such alignment in mind.”
- **The Role of Testing in Elementary Schools.** *Smith, M.L., Edelsky, C., Draper, K., Rottenberg, C., Cherland, M.; 1989; Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing; Arizona State University; ERIC Document # ED338673.*
Source: ERIC
(http://eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/23/44/75.pdf)
According to the abstract: “The goal of this study was to understand the role that external testing plays in elementary schools. Focus was on uncovering teachers' beliefs about testing and preparing students to take tests, how these beliefs and values are organized, and what implications they might have on practice. To accomplish this, the day-to-day life in classrooms and how tests and results come into play were studied.”
- **The Impact of Statewide Mandated Testing on Teachers’ Classroom Assessment and Instructional Practices.** *McMillan, J.H., Myran, S., Workman, D.; 1999; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association (Montreal, Quebec, Canada, April 19- 23, 1999). Funding also provided by the Virginia Educational Research Association; ERIC Document #: ED431041.*
Source: ERIC
(http://www.eric.ed.gov/ERICDocs/data/ericdocs2sql/content_storage_01/0000019b/80/17/98/49.pdf)

According to the abstract, in this article: “the impact of the Virginia statewide Standards of Learning (SOL) testing program on classroom instructional and assessment practices was studied through surveys before and after implementation of the testing program. The sample represented responses from 570 secondary school teachers (of mathematics, social studies, English, and science) and 152 elementary school teachers from grades 3 through 5. Teachers were asked about changes in their instructional and assessment practices.”

Key words and search strings used in the search:

“teaching to the test”, “George Madaus”, “state mandated SAT”, “large scale assessment”

Institute for Education Science Sources: National Center for Education Statistics (NCES); Institute for Education Sciences (IES)

Other Federally Funded Sites: The Assessment and Accountability Comprehensive Center; The National High School Center; The Center on Innovation and Improvement; The Center on Instruction; National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing

Additional Data Resources: ERIC; EBSCO Databases; Education Index Retrospective; FirstSearch (OCLC); ProQuest

Criteria for inclusion:

When Reference Desk Researchers review resources, they consider, among other things, four factors:

1. **Date of the publication:** The most current information is included unless in the case of nationally known seminal resources
2. **Source and funder of the report/study/brief/article:** Priority is given to IES, nationally funded, and certain other vetted sources known for strict attention to research protocols);
3. **Methodology:** i.e. Random control trial studies, surveys, self-assessments, literature reviews, policy briefs, etc. Priority for inclusion is given generally to random control trial study findings; however, the reader should note at least the following factors when basing decisions on these resources: Numbers of participants (just a few? Thousands?); Selection (did the participants volunteer in the study, or were they chosen?); Representation (were findings generalized from a homogeneous or a diverse pool of participants? Was the study sample representative of the population as a whole?)
4. **Existing knowledge base:** Although we strive to include vetted resources, there are times when the research base is slim or non-existent. In these cases we have included the best resources we could find, which may include newspaper articles, interviews with content specialists, organization websites, etc.

REL Northeast and Islands

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