

The case for high stakes assessments research paper examples

[Technology](#), [Development](#)



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ABSTRACT.

Most schools in the United States have for a long time established standardized testing where educational achievements tests make reasonable inferences on the status of students. As a response to the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, high stakes assessments have replaced the standardized testing method of assessment. Under the new law, schools develop their assessments, which gauge the progress, of the students as well as evaluate the work of the teachers. Many agree that high stakes assessments impact on children learning while many disagree on their input to student's performance. As high stakes testing deeply embeds in the education system, it is crucial to understand its literature and impacts, not only to the curriculum, but also with regards to the student's well being. This is a literature review on the concept behind high stakes testing in schools, in United States.

Literature Review of High Stakes Assessments.

For almost a century, standardized testing for assessing intelligence (aptitudes) and achievements has shaped the American educational

philosophy. Currently, such tests are common in most schools. Among the most used tests in primary and secondary grades are Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), Metropolitan Achievement Test (MAT) and Stanford Achievement Tests (SAT). In addition, secondary students take the SAT exams recommended by the College Board for college entrants (Madaus, Russell and Higgins, 2009).

Applicants take these exams for assessments on aptitudes, speed and achievements. The assessors use the results of the tests in making informed decisions on instruction and curriculum and also in predicting on how successful a student may become in the future (Ladd, Thomas and Karen, 2000). These tests have been successful, and most Americans have faith on them. Research indicates that most citizens are satisfied with the information derived from these tests and the application on their use.

Sometimes the scores from these tests denied some students from attending colleges of choice. Most of these students ended up in, public community, colleges with admissions solely on the basis of their scores. The challenge was students undertaking courses which did not suit their interests. The times have since changed.

High stakes testing can be traced in the 1980's with the publication of A Nation at Risk report. This report stated that most public schools in US lacked thorough standards and this was the reason behind the failure of many learning institutions as well as low performance of students (Neel, 2006). The report also analyzed the importance of social promotion and individual decision making among students. The move was boosted by a campaign by Business Roundtable (BRT), which initiated awareness to return

basic curriculum in the existing standards.

In 1998, the Louisiana state legislature allotted a School Accountability Advisory Committee, which would inaugurate high stake testing. The first target was fourth and eighth graders, and also those students who failed to perform on the predetermined levels. Schools reported to have low performance records were also to be sanctioned. Within a short time span, more than seven states realized the sense behind high stakes assessments and led a statewide promotion of the same (Madaus, Russell and Higgins, 2009).

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), was signed on January 8, 2002. Under this Act, all children regardless of social status, race, mental or physical challenges or language, were to have equal chances and opportunities towards high and quality public education (Neel, 2006). The establishment of this Act made high stakes testing the law of assessing performance in the country. To students, the enactment of NCLB and high stake assessments was significant due to link to promotion to the next grades. To the tutors, the implementation of the tests was seen as an instructional program due to the mode in which the results were publicized (Heubert, Hauser and National Research, 1997). NCLB linked standardized testing to sanctions for public schools, which do not produce adequate yearly progress.

Under the NCLB Act, schools should provide special tutorials to low performing students through contracting private firms. In some extremes, under this Act, sanctions may call for a substitution of an entire school staff if found underperforming (Ladd, Thomas and Karen, 2000). This led to protests as many educators regarded the act as an elevation to unforeseen heights in

the education sector. Many of these educators viewed the tests as inappropriate both in the application and in providing inescapable conclusions.

The implementation of high stakes assessment took place after the signing of the NCLB Act in 2001. The aim of the tests was to help students and teachers in preparation for their final tests to graduation to the next grade levels. The tests have their own pros and cons; on one hand these tests assist educators in the creation of lesson plans (Madaus, Russell and Higgins, 2009). The results are used as a tool for progress and not as a judgment on intelligence or abilities of the students. In addition, the results aid parents in reviewing the performance of different schools and assist them in making decisions on where to take their children for best education.

However, the publication of the results of the tests may lead to neglect for some schools, especially where there is low performances. No parent would wish to take their children to such schools, whether the teachers are substituted or not (Heubert, Hauser and National Research, 1997). In addition, the tests cause anxiety which in most cases lead to failure even to students with bright performance records. Experienced educators, view this is two different angles; such anxiety leads to failure due to nervousness and, on the other hand, such frequent practices help students in psychological preparations in handling pressure (Madaus, Russell and Higgins, 2009). The success of the assessments, and how students perform is, however, totally dependent on the involvement of the educators.

Under the high stakes assessment, most schools and educators are experiencing increasing trends of inspection. Experienced teachers think that

the level of students' performance is influenced by the level of students taking the tests. Apparently, the teachers believe that teachers who educate bright students always have better results than teachers who deal with less able students. With this perception, high stakes tests, are viewed to be skewed in benefits to some classes of students (Neel, 2006). This poses a risk to the jobs of many educators who deal with slow learners or students with special needs. This has apparently led to teachers performing pre assessment tests. Such tests act as guidance to the main tests or even to the extremes of changing the student's answers on the tests to increase on the performance ratings.

There is a developing need for accountability of the high stakes assessments to avoid provision of biased performance results. There is a call for accountability tests so that the results of high stakes assessments should not be the only base to evaluate the quality of school staff. Such a test should enhance total evaluation of educators with limited influence on the results of high stake assessments. Accountability is required so that the provisions in NCLB Act, where no student should be left behind, are successfully implemented in the country (Heubert, Hauser and National Research, 1997).

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