

Narrative

Topic: The Effects of High Stakes Testing on Minority Students

According to several studies, Minority students have been particularly disadvantaged by the undue use of high stakes test. The test results have become the basis for promotion and retention in our public schools. Fail to score well on the tests and there is a strong likelihood that you will be retained, this in spite of the strong evidence that grade retention does not benefit students and may actual harm them. High stakes testing does not contribute to learning. Students who are retained drop out more often than other students. Students that have been retained once have a 40% higher chance of dropping out and a 60% higher chance if retained twice. This happens largely because being overage in-grade damages students' self confidence and leads them to disengage from school.” The whole concept of high stakes testing is the antithesis of sound education policy.

Students who are retained are more likely to become disengaged from the education process and eventually drop out of school. Retention rates are higher for African Americans, Latinos and children from low-income families. Overall, research has found that the presence of high stakes tests increases students’ probability of dropping out (Reardon and Galindo 2002, Clarke et al. 2000). Fletcher (2002) shows that African-American and Hispanic students fail graduation tests approximately twice as often as Anglo students. Reardon and Galindo (2002) follow this study, confirming that minority students do suffer from the added hurdle of high stakes testing (as does Jacob 2000). Clarke et al. (2000) evaluate testing and find that its most significant effect on minority dropout rates is actually filtering through the effect of grade retention. These scholars show that high stakes testing causes increased grade retention and, in turn, increased grade retention leads to higher dropout rates. This perceived bias against minority groups has led to public protests by leading minority political groups (NAACP, MALDEF, ACLU), arguing that high stakes testing leads to increased dropouts and a new discrimination (Guillen 2001).

One particularly interesting study noted that Since 1991, a high school diploma requires satisfactory performance on the TAAS exit tests. Research findings suggest that because of this requirement some 40,000 of Texas's 1993 sophomores dropped out of school. The dropout rates for black, Hispanic, and white students were about 25 percent, 23 percent, and 13 percent respectively. In addition, it was found that the average black and Hispanic student was three times more likely to drop out, even controlling for socio-economic status, academic track, language program participation, and school quality. Florida, like Texas, has unusually high rates of retention in grade 9. It also turns out that Florida, like Texas, has one of the lowest rates of high school completion – only about 80% – among the states. The states with the highest dropout rates had Minimum Competency Testing programs with standards set at least in part by the state. Nine of the ten used the tests in decisions about high school graduation; four used them in decisions about promotion. In sum, these ten states used minimum competency tests with higher stakes and less flexible standards than the states with the lowest dropout rates.