

## What to do

to resist high stakes testing and advance effective, fair, and responsive assessment.

- **Educate ourselves, colleagues, friends, and neighbors**

Organize parent / teacher / student study groups, community forums, teach-ins, Distribute this pamphlet at professional, union and community meetings; provide information to others via email, list serves etc about high stakes tests and alternatives.

- **Help shape public opinion**

Write letters to the editor and emails to school board members, principals, and superintendents. Speak at forums and board meetings. Call and participate in talk shows. Publish newsletter, duplicate and distribute articles. Arrange press conferences. Form a local TV and print media watchdog group.

- **Challenge / change legislation**

Meet with legislators and political candidates; speak at legislative hearings, political forums. Work with professional associations, union locals, local political parties, civil liberties, and civil rights groups to publicly oppose high stakes testing.

- **Demonstrate / protest**

Help organize and attend public demonstrations marches, and protests. They are an effective means of bringing issues to the attention of the public, elected leaders and the press.

- **Opt out**

Join with and support other parents, teachers or students who for reasons of conscience are ready to refuse to participate in high stakes standardized testing. Parents of students from grade 2-11 have the legal right exempt their child from taking the STAR/SAT9 (and its replacement). Schools cannot penalize exempted students. Support high school students who choose to boycott HSEE. With limited exceptions, there are no exemptions from HSEE.

## Support repeal of high stakes testing.

Cut the link between HSEE, STAR, API, and a State imposed system of rewards and sanctions. A single test score or set of scores should never be used for making final and fateful decisions about students, schools, and school staff.

## Support assessments that:

- Combat racism; enhance educational opportunities.
- Support and improve student learning.
- Raise standards but do not impose an official federal or state approved view of teaching, learning, language and culture.
- Help teachers teach better.
- Are developed collaboratively by teachers, scholars, writers, artists, parents, and community.
- Encourage and reward school and community level initiatives to create locally appropriate context sensitive assessments.

## For more information

Nat'l Cntr for Fair and Open Testing: [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org)  
Assessment Reform Network: [www.arn.org](http://www.arn.org)  
Alfie Kohn, Anti-testing advocate: [AlfieKohn.org](http://AlfieKohn.org)  
Students Against Testing: [nomorettests.com](http://nomorettests.com)  
CA Coalition Authentic Reform of Ed. [www.CalCare.org](http://www.CalCare.org)  
Tchrs for Social Justice: [www.teachers4socialjustice.org](http://www.teachers4socialjustice.org)  
Californians for Justice: [caljustice.org](http://caljustice.org)  
Applied Research Center: [www.arc.org](http://www.arc.org)  
Justice Matters, SF : [www.edjustice.org](http://www.edjustice.org)  
Rethinking Schools: [www.rethinkingschools.org](http://www.rethinkingschools.org)  
Harvard Civil Rights Project, Conference on Testing: [www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/conferences/](http://www.law.harvard.edu/civilrights/conferences/)  
Alternative news source: [www.alterNet.org](http://www.alterNet.org)  
Nat'l Council of Teachers of English [www.ncte.org](http://www.ncte.org)  
Designs for Change, Chicago: [www.designsforchange.org](http://www.designsforchange.org)  
Educ. Policy Research Unit, Arizona State University: [www.educationanalysis.org](http://www.educationanalysis.org)  
The Learning Record [www.learningrecord.org](http://www.learningrecord.org)  
**STAR / SAT9 WAIVER REQUEST**

Dear Principal,  
I do not want my child \_\_\_\_\_  
to take the STAR test this spring.  
Signature \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

No special form needed. You may copy, sign and give to principal.

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# What you need to know about

# high stakes testing

# in California

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P 3.1. 02

## What are ‘high stakes’ tests?

These are tests mandated by law whose scores are used as the basis for distributing rewards and punishments to students, teachers, schools, and school administrators.

### ***What happens to students who fail tests?***

Students cannot be legally denied promotion based solely on STAR/ SAT9 (or its replacement). Standardized test scores, however, are routinely used to place students in remedial tracks, to admit students to special programs, academic tracks and ‘magnet’ high schools. Beginning in 2004, students who do not pass the exit exam (HSEE) can be denied a high school diploma.

### ***What happens to schools that do not meet test score targets?***

Schools and teachers are ineligible for financial rewards. If schools do not improve over time, they could lose eligibility for state and/or federal funding, could be disbanded or ‘reconstituted’ and principals, teachers, and school staff reassigned, demoted or possibly fired.

### ***How are schools and teachers rewarded?***

Schools meeting and exceeding target scores receive additional per pupil funding. Amounts vary depending on annual educational appropriations. In 2001 teachers in eligible schools received bonuses of five to twenty-five thousand dollars; schools about sixty dollars per student.

### ***What is the difference between a normed test and a criterion-referenced test?***

In a normed test 50% score above, and 50% below the average score, since scores are based on a ‘normal’ or ‘bell’ curve. A student’s score on a normed reading test, for example, tells us only how his or her score compares to the scores of others taking the same (or equivalent) reading test. ***There is no relationship between a reading test score and a person’s actual reading performance.*** In a ‘criterion-referenced’ test, failure is determined a cut score set by a appointed government panel. ***As with a normed test, there is no connection between test scores and actual academic performance.***

## What are the high stakes tests now used in California?

California’s system of statewide assessment is called ‘Standardized Testing And Reporting’ or STAR. In 1998 the STAR program authorized the use of a version of the Stanford Achievement Test 9<sup>th</sup> edition (SAT9) a commercially available normed test published and serviced by Harcourt Measurement, a division of Reed-Elsevier one of the world’s largest publishers.

### **SAT 9: Stanford Achievement Test**

A normed test given each spring to almost all students from grades 2 through 11. It is offered in English only and tests reading, writing and mathematics for all grades, spelling through grade 8, and science and social science/history from grades 9 to 11. In 2003, the SAT9 is to be replaced with the California Standards Test or CST, a ‘criterion-referenced’ test that the State says is to be aligned to the curriculum standards. A shorter normed test essentially similar to the SAT9 will continue to be administered.

### **HSEE: High School Exit Examination**

A ‘criterion-referenced’ language comprehension and math test given only in English. Test items are aligned to the State’s language and math standards. Beginning in 2004, all students must pass HSEE to receive a high school diploma. They have eight opportunities to pass.

### **API : Academic Performance Index**

A numerical index that ranks all public schools in California. According to the State, the API is a “measure of the academic performance and growth of schools.” API ranks are currently assigned solely on SAT9 scores. An API of 800 (on a scale of 200-1000) was set by the State Board of Education as the minimum standard. ***Note that the 800 API score is not based on observation of schools or on an assessment of students’ or teachers actual performance.***

## Do high stakes tests raise academic standards and increase educational opportunity?

- Studies on the effects of high stakes tests show that rather than erasing educational inequalities and raising levels of academic achievement, high stakes tests increased the race and class achievement gap with English language learners especially at risk. Studies of the Texas, Massachusetts, and New York State exit exams revealed a sharp rise in drop out rates particularly in schools that primarily serve Latino and African Americans. It is estimated that almost 70% of students in some of the poorer California districts will not pass HSEE.
- High stakes testing degrades the curriculum and shrinks learning opportunities for many students, particularly in schools that serve the children of the poor and of color. Schools focus energy and resources on test preparedness. Whatever does not contribute directly to short-term gains in test scores is disrupted or displaced —bilingual education, critical thinking, reading for meaning, interdisciplinary studies, the arts, music, citizenship and community service programs, physical and health education, and multicultural curriculum.
- Many teachers, counselors, and administrators oppose making final and irrevocable decisions based almost solely on standardized test scores. They object to the preoccupation with test results which inevitably leads to a standardized, one-size-fits-all curriculum.
- As mandates for high stakes tests increase, it becomes increasingly difficult to recruit and retain experienced and talented teachers and administrators particularly in schools located at the low end of rankings –the schools that serve children of the poor, limited English immigrants, persons of color, a majority of whom live in California’s most needy and financially stressed urban districts.

# Some Questions and Talking Points

- What marks tests as ‘high stakes’? It is CONTROL. Control by government of assessment and of rewards and sanctions. Test results in effect shape school curriculum, pedagogy; district, school and classroom level decisions and priorities.

1. Do high stakes tests improve the quality of a school or of your children’s education?

2. Are academic achievement and achievement test scores one and the same? (*Does it matter whether it is a ‘normed’ or ‘criterion referenced’ tests?*)

What is the relationship between test score and an actual performance? What do standardized scores predict? What is their diagnostic value?

- ● ● Are the race gap in academic achievement and the gap in achievement test scores one and the same?

3. Why high stakes testing policies is a form of institutional racism

Where is the racism and cultural bias to be found? If not in the items, then where?

4. The technology of standardized educational testing rests on:

- a) Racist 19<sup>th</sup> century “scientific” assumptions about human capacities and achievements, ‘bell curve’ statistical models in the construction and scoring of standardized tests.
- b) Archaic early 20<sup>th</sup> century information processing technology.

5. What explains the emergence over the last ten years of high stakes testing policies by state and federal governments (laws and regulations that align standardized curriculum to standardized tests, and link test results to rewards and sanctions.)?

6. Is change possible? Yes if...

# Summary Points

- High stakes: What marks tests as ‘high stakes’ is CONTROL. Control by government of assessment and of rewards and sanctions. Test results in effect shape school curriculum, pedagogy; district, school, and classroom level decisions and priorities.
1. There is no evidence that high stakes testing improves the quality of the school and your children’s education. In fact, there is considerable evidence that high stakes testing degrades the curriculum and depresses standards. (If standardized tests improved schools, it would have already happened) The small upward shifts the media and test advocates sometimes tout are misleading and from an educational point of view almost meaningless. So what is the educational meaning of 3-5% or even a 10% shift (up or down) which often translates to a shift of a mere handful of multiple choice test items.
  2. Academic achievement and the achievement test scores are NOT one and the same. (*True for both normed tests and criterion referenced tests.*)
    - a) There is no relationship between test score and an actual academic performance. A standardized reading test score says virtually nothing about a person’s actual ability to read.
    - b) Standardized tests have little or ‘predictive validity’ except to social class (\$10,000 =30 SAT points) and are of no diagnostic value for teachers and students.
      - ● ● Corollary: Race gap in academic achievement and the gap in achievement test scores are NOT one and the same This confusion harms all but is particularly harmful to students of color.
  3. High stakes testing serves as a form of institutional racism

The racial and cultural bias is NOT primarily lodged in the content of test items.

What makes standardized tests racist is:

    - a) Disproportionate (ratio: approx. 30%→70+%) test failure rates for Persons of Color and English language learners as compared to white native English speakers.
    - b) No demonstrable connection between performance on a standardized academic and a person’s actual academic performance. The denial of educational opportunity and access based not on performance (not on what a person does and can do) = institutional racism.
    - c) The technology of standardized tests creates and inflates differences that have little or no educational significance. The actual ‘race gap’ in scores is about 10% (range of 8 -15% *regardless* of the test.) On a 50 item multiple choice test this represents a difference of 2½–4½ test items.
  4. The technology of standardized testing rests on a) racist 19<sup>th</sup> century “scientific” assumptions about human intelligence, capacities and achievements, and b) archaic early 20<sup>th</sup> century information processing technology. Multiple choice, standardized test technology is dated and at a scientific and technological dead-end. The microprocessor makes possible school site managed, context, situation, and person sensitive assessments that were unimaginable when multiple choice tests were invented. Exploring these technologies is not in the interest of an industry heavily invested in standardized curriculum and multiple-choice test technology.
  5. High stakes testing policies. Why do they exist and continue to expand, in spite of all this?
    - a) In our hearts we as individuals and as a culture believe in these tests. At home and at school, we are socialized and have come to accept the fiction that standardized multiple-choice tests tell the ‘real’ story.
    - b) Most politicians, corporate leaders and, corporate, interest groups, major think tanks and foundations, the DC based union and professional leadership back high stakes testing.
    - c) There are powerful corporate interests in the test publishing, servicing and test prep and packaged curriculum industry (E.g.: Harold McGraw of McGraw Hill, the nations largest text and test publisher including the highly standardized ‘Open Court’ reading program) Installing and maintaining standardized curriculum and centralized assessment policies are in economic self interest of the major publishers
      - (High stakes testing sold to the public as cheap is NOT cheap. *Costs are in the multi billions.*)
    - d) ● ● ● The persistence of the myth that there are no alternative assessment policies and forms of testing.
  6. Significant change is possible only if the ‘grassroots’ --coalitions of teachers parents, students, and members of local communities -- educate themselves on the issues and work to resist these failed assessment policies, and replace them with policies that serve our children, our communities and the nation as a whole.

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