

# Testing Reform Victories 2015:

## *Growing Grassroots Movement Rolls Back Testing Overkill*

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### **Summary**

The growing strength and sophistication of the U.S. testing resistance and reform movement began turning the tide against standardized exam overuse and misuse during the 2014-2015 school year. Assessment reformers scored significant wins in many states, thanks to intense pressure brought by unprecedented waves of opting out and other forms of political action. Even President Obama and Secretary of Education Duncan, long advocates of test-and-punish 'reform' strategies, now concede that "there is too much testing."

Across the country, educators, parents and students launched petitions, organized mass rallies and held public forums. High school students refused to take excessive exams and walked out. Teachers struck to demand (and win) testing reforms and better learning conditions. Administrators and elected school boards adopted strong resolutions against high-stakes testing. All this growth built on the [successes of test reformers](#) in previous years.

Parents and teachers who launched campaigns against standardized exam overkill in their schools and districts have emerged as effective leaders who continue to build a stronger movement. The mainstream media no longer ignores or marginalizes calls for "less testing, more learning" and "an end to high-stakes testing." Instead, the assessment reform movement and the reasons behind it are [consistently covered in depth](#) by major newspapers, TV and radio outlets from coast to coast.

Public opinion shows a powerful shift against overreliance on test-and-punish policies and in favor of assessment reform based on multiple measures. Education policy makers and legislators have been forced to respond by at least publicly acknowledging the harms of high-stakes testing and the need for a course correction.

Cries of "enough is enough" were loud enough to penetrate the Oval Office, prompting President Obama to acknowledge in October that high-stakes exams are out of control in U.S. public schools. Activists, however, continue to push to ensure that vague rhetoric from the nation's capital is followed by concrete changes in policy. The Obama administration has refused to end its test-and-punish policies, so Congress must act. Both houses have passed bills to end the mandates for test-based teacher evaluations and school and district sanctions.

Meanwhile, the movement has won concrete victories at the state and local level. These include repeal of exit exams in several states, elimination of many tests, reduction of testing time, a

surge of colleges going test-optional, and development of alternative assessment and accountability systems. The past year's victories include:

- A sharp *reversal of the decades-long trend to adopt high school exit exams*. Policy-makers repealed the California graduation test, while Texas loosened its requirements, joining six states that repealed or delayed these exams in the 2013-2014 school year. California, Georgia, South Carolina and Arizona also decided to grant diplomas retroactively to thousands of students denied them because of test scores.
- Florida *suspended Jeb Bush's 3<sup>rd</sup> grade reading test-based promotion policy*. Oklahoma, New York, and North Carolina revised their test-based promotion policies, and New Mexico legislators blocked the governor's effort to impose one.
- States and districts that *rolled back mandated testing* include Minnesota, Virginia, Florida, Colorado, Maryland, Dallas and Lee County, Florida.
- *Opting out surged to new levels* in New York, New Jersey and across the country – approaching 500,000 nationally – riveting the attention of the media and pushing governors and legislatures to act.
- A series of opinion polls *documented increasing numbers of voters and parents who agree there is too much standardized testing* and it should not be used for high-stakes purposes.
- The past year was the best one on record for the test-optional college admissions movement, with *three dozen more colleges and universities reducing or eliminating ACT/SAT requirements, driving the total to more than 850*.
- In California, New Hampshire, and elsewhere there are *promising efforts to develop alternative systems of assessment and accountability*, deemphasizing standardized tests while incorporating multiple measures of school performance.

The movement's growth and accomplishments are tremendously encouraging. But it's far too early to declare victory and go home. In the 2015-2016 school year, activists will use lessons learned from their initial battles to further expand and strengthen the resistance movement and ensure political leaders go beyond lip service to implement meaningful assessment reforms.

The movement's ultimate goal goes well beyond winning less testing, lower stakes and better assessments. It seeks a democratic transformation of public education from a system driven by a narrow "test-and-punish" agenda to one that meets the broad educational needs and goals of diverse students and families.

- The full report is available at <http://www.fairtest.org/testing-reform-victories-2015-report>
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