

FairTest

National Center for Fair & Open Testing

USING THE NEW TESTING SURVEY IN REFORM CAMPAIGNS

FairTest worked with the National Coalition of Urban Education Associations (NCUEA) Time on Learning Committee to develop a survey that teacher unions can use with their members to expose the consequences of high-stakes testing. (The survey is available at <http://www.fairtest.org/time-to-learn-survey-impact-of-testing>.) The ideas below draw on the experience of NCUEA and others. All stakeholder groups, including parents and students, can use survey results in local or statewide campaigns to reduce the amount of testing, end high-stakes uses of test scores, and promote teacher-controlled performance- and classroom-based assessments.

How unions can use this survey:

- Launch a discussion within the union. For example, call a meeting to go over the results, talk about what they mean, and plan actions. Hold meetings school by school, with local leadership participating.
- If you are already talking with members about testing, use the survey to quantify teacher views. You can also gather comments via the survey's comment boxes, which can be as valuable as the quantitative data in educating the public. The Sacramento union's leaders first went to schools for extensive face-to-face discussions with members, then used the survey to systematically document teacher concerns.
- Use the survey to launch discussions with the district administration and the community about the amount and consequences of testing. This can lead to:
 - an official district audit of the amount of testing, the time each test takes, the purpose of each test, and who mandates it. Or, if the district has already agreed to or done an audit, a survey can be both a check on district results and a way to pull together what teachers think about testing and to help mobilize them for winning changes.
 - educating the community about the extent and consequences of testing using community forums, letters to parents, local newspapers, radio or TV, and social media.
 - turning testing into a contract issue, as Sacramento, St. Paul and Pasco, WA, have done. At the bargaining table, each of these districts won test cutbacks as part of their contract. Sacramento eliminated all its district-mandated benchmark tests.

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◦ campaigning for the school board to cut back district-mandated testing. If such a campaign already exists, survey results can bolster the effort. Las Cruces, NM, and San Diego, CA, are among districts that cut testing as a result of union-led campaigns. In Maryland, a union survey was a valuable tool in winning a legislative cap on testing time.

◦ raising issues about what assessment can and should be. If not tests, then what? Campaigns can open the door to efforts to restore teacher authority to assess their students and to implement performance assessments.

Parent, student and community groups can also use the survey:

- Parent groups can persuade local unions to administer it and then help share the results with the community. Parents also can modify the questions for use with other school stakeholders.
- Student groups can gather responses from fellow students.

Getting the survey:

The survey questions are available in three ways: in JotForm, which a group can use (there is a cost for large numbers of users); the questions are available on a webpage you can download and adapt using a word processor and then a tool like GoogleForms; and the JotForm version is available as PDF to use in showing it to others or considering how to format the questions in Google or some other way. Go to <http://www.fairtest.org/time-to-learn-survey-impact-of-testing>