

# FairTest

National Center for Fair & Open Testing

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## What's Wrong with Graduation and Promotion Tests

“High-stakes” tests are exams used to make important decisions about students, such as graduation or grade promotion. Decades of research shows the key reasons why test scores should never be the determining factor in making major decisions about students:

### **High-stakes tests do not improve educational outcomes.**

Extensive research shows that students who are held back do not progress academically as well as comparable children who are promoted. They also suffer a loss of self-esteem and are more likely to drop out of school. Comprehensive national studies have found that graduation tests lead to higher dropout rates while they do not improve learning for those who stay in school.

### **Test-based decisions do not accurately assess many students.**

Some students who successfully demonstrate learning through classroom performance do not score well on standardized tests. These often include students with test anxiety and learning disabilities as well as students whose first language is not English.

### **Standardized tests reinforce inequity.**

Society should not punish students for adults' failure to provide children with the necessary tools for success. Many students – particularly those from low-income and minority families, along with English language learners and the disabled -- attend under-funded schools or lack access to high quality educational programs necessary for their success. Young adults who don't obtain a diploma because of testing hurdles earn far less, have less stable families, and are more likely to be in prison.

### **High-stakes testing produces teaching to the test.**

The higher the stakes, the more schools focus instruction on the tests. As a result, whole subjects are being dropped; e.g., science, social studies, music and art. Important skills that cannot be tested with standardized tests – such as writing research papers, public speaking or conducting laboratory experiments – are not taught. This narrowing of curriculum is most severe for low-income students.

### **High-stakes testing drives out the best and most needed teachers.**

Talented educators are discouraged, even disgusted, by the overemphasis on testing. Many excellent teachers leave, often from schools that need them most.

### **High-stakes testing gives the public bad information.**

Even the best tests fail to provide enough information to judge school quality. Teaching to the test causes score gains that may not represent actual improvements in learning. That misleads the public into thinking schools are improving, when they may actually be worse due to a narrowed curriculum.

### **Measurement experts say basing a decision on a single test is wrong.**

The *Standards* of the measurement profession and most professional education organizations state that making a decision based on a single test score is a misuse of standardized testing.

*High quality assessment is an educational necessity.*

*High-stakes standardized tests harm educational quality and promote inequity.*

For more information on standardized testing and high quality assessments, visit [www.fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org).