

Using student
test scores to
evaluate teachers

***What's at
stake for
your child?***

The unintended consequences of increased standardized testing will transform our classrooms into places that no teacher wants to teach or no child wants to learn.

When it comes to our public schools, it's clear that parents want the best teachers for their children. What is not clear is how we define "best."

There is a national movement to define the best teachers as those most successful at raising your child's standardized test scores. If this movement holds sway, the impact that a teacher has on a student will all come down to a number. And that number will be used to decide if an educator gets to keep his or her job or receives a raise.

To counter the impact of a single test score on your child's future, some plans call for the use of student performance over a series of tests to determine the relative effectiveness of a teacher. These "growth models," which are called value-added models (VAM), are an attempt to evaluate teachers by analyzing the standardized test scores of their students.

This approach may sound reasonable, but a look beneath its surface shows serious limitations. More important, judging teachers in this manner will ultimately reduce the quality of education your child receives.



New Jersey
EDUCATION
Association

180 W. State Street, Box 1211
Trenton, NJ 08607-1211
609.599.4561
njea.org



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What's at stake for your child?

More testing—no wait, a *lot* more testing

If your child experiences stress on standardized exam days, imagine the anxiety when students are tested—and then tested again—in every grade level and in every subject. Is it realistic to think that a standardized test can really assess what a kindergartner has learned? How will it work in music class or art?

- Nearly two-thirds of teachers work in a grade level or subject area where students are not subjected to a standardized test. In order for these teachers to be evaluated based on student test scores, new standardized tests would have to be developed and administered in every classroom.
- In some cases, students would need to be tested before they take a particular class as well as after they have completed it.
- Standardized testing is a big business. The standardized tests your child takes are created and scored by for-profit companies with a vested interest in more testing.

Is spending money to create tests for students just to evaluate their teachers really the best use of your tax dollars?

Less collaboration among teachers

If you think last year's teacher is going to share tips on how to help Johnny understand math with this year's teacher, think again. Value-added models compare the gains in student test scores made by one teacher to the gains made by another teacher.

In other words, these teachers are now competing against one another as they are ranked from most effective to least effective.

- These rankings could determine who gets a raise and who doesn't. They could be the difference between who stays and who goes. If teachers are competing for jobs and pay, where is the incentive to work together for the good of the students and the good of the school?
- While it may be reasonable to compare the scores of the students of two sixth-grade teachers, how do you compare a first-grade and an eighth-grade math teacher? Imagine the difficulties when comparing the 10-point gain of a student in a French class to a 10-point gain in physics.

Standardized tests are designed to measure what a student learned, not what a teacher taught. Think about your interactions with your own children: no matter how old they are, you know that what you tell your children to do and what they actually do are often very different.

A narrowing of the curriculum

Or put another way, goodbye field trips and classroom projects — hello drilling. When teachers are evaluated on the outcome of a standardized test, they will be forced to teach only those topics that are tested. When their jobs and salaries are on the line, who can blame them?

- Remember that monarch butterfly project that sparked your daughter's interest in biology? How about that poster contest that finally got your son excited about social studies? Unless these programs can be proven to advance students' standardized test scores, they will no longer exist.

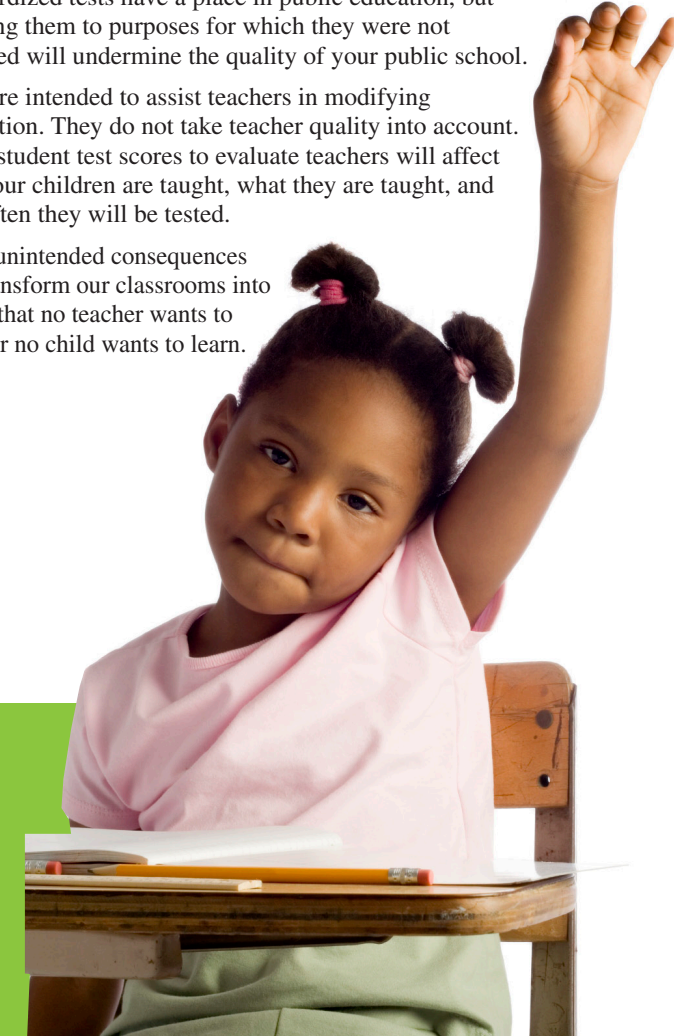
- Telling students a story and taking them on field trips are not activities that occur at the expense of subjects that we deem important. Exposing children to the performing arts and community service activities will actually do more to help them learn math and science than spending every minute of the school day on math and science.

Testing has a role

Standardized tests have a place in public education, but applying them to purposes for which they were not designed will undermine the quality of your public school.

Tests are intended to assist teachers in modifying instruction. They do not take teacher quality into account. Using student test scores to evaluate teachers will affect how your children are taught, what they are taught, and how often they will be tested.

These unintended consequences will transform our classrooms into places that no teacher wants to teach or no child wants to learn.



FOR more information on teacher evaluation and the use of student standardized test scores, visit njea.org.

