



PAA POSITION PAPER
PARENTS STAND UP AGAINST TEST STRESS
JULY 2015

Across our nation, children of all ages are showing an alarming increase in test anxiety. Larger percentages of students are reporting test stress, more are seeking test-stress counseling, and more are experiencing severe psychological and physiological symptoms tied to testing. The rate of ADHD diagnosis has increased significantly since the No Child Left Behind testing regime began.

Parents, teachers, administrators, and mental health professionals report student nausea, dizziness, crying, vomiting, panic attacks, asthma attacks, tantrums, headaches, sleeplessness, refusal to go to school, “freaking out,” meltdowns, depression, suicide threats and suicide attempts

Recent research has demonstrated that prolonged stress can profoundly undermine learning , mental health and brain development in young people. As a result, while testing is promoted as improving education, test stress is in fact sabotaging learning for many students.

The misuse and overuse of standardized tests is doing particular harm to our most vulnerable children. Students with special needs, low-income students, children of color and those whose first language is not English are most likely to do poorly on norm-referenced standardized tests, and to suffer the high-stakes consequences of retention, inappropriate labeling and tracking, push-out or drop-out. One study has found that as many as 41 percent of African American elementary school children have experienced high test anxiety.

Much of the literature on test anxiety focuses on how to help children cope with the stress.. In contrast, PAA believes the stress itself must be addressed. **No child should be exposed to prolonged, intense stress** which can inhibit brain function and take a toll on mental health. Instead of more coping strategies, PAA recommends the following policy changes>>>

*Please see our one-page fact sheet here: <http://parentsacrossamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Test-Stress-7-25-15final.pdf>
and our documentation paper here: <http://parentsacrossamerica.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Test-Stress-Documentation-7-23-15final.pdf>*

PAA recommendations to stop abusive testing

End high-stakes standardized testing: A switch from high-stakes testing to a systematic review of actual student work would

- lessen excessive test stress that undermines learning,
- provide superior evidence of academic progress, and
- enrich classroom experiences.

Use report cards as the primary record of student progress because they are

- the only evaluations that look at the students' work over time and across all areas of learning and growth.
- prepared by experienced, qualified adults who personally observe and assess each student's progress.
- easily understood by parents, unlike secretive standardized test scores.

De-emphasize The Tests: JUST SAY NO to test pep rallies, test prep worksheets that replace meaningful class- and homework, constant messages about consequences of test "failure," prizes for test-takers, etc.

Recognize opt-out rights: Parents are opting their children out of testing in record numbers, in part to protect them from the stress caused by misuse and overuse of standardized tests. Federal and state law must support this decision by parents.

Advocate for local and state assessment policies that align with professional standards for assessment.