



References for “How high-stakes standardized testing is harming our children's mental health” paper

Updated January 2016

Test stress in children is reaching unprecedented levels.

1. Why Stress Inhibits Learning, William R. Stixrudd, Ph.D., LearnNow.org

<http://learnnow.org/topics/stress/reduce-stress-to-increase-learning>

“I test dozens of kids every year who are so stressed out that they have trouble learning and keeping up in school. And it’s not just my practice. Research indicates that kids today are experiencing record levels of stress-related mental health problems—and much more stress than their parents realize.”

1a. School Psychologists: Common Core is Giving Kids Anxiety 11/20/2015

<http://www.wgrz.com/news/school-psychologists-common-core-is-giving-kids-anxiety/12966234>

“State tests are the ones that are stressing kids out, school psychologists in New York said.

“About three-quarters of school psychologists from among the state's nearly 700 school districts said state tests are causing greater anxiety than local assessments, a survey released Friday by the state School Boards Association and the state Association of School Psychologists found.

“The anxiety hasn't, for the most part, led to physical ailments, the school psychologists said, but the new Common Core testing has translated into students feeling more stressed.

““This report should make all education stakeholders – from state policymakers to local teachers to parents – aware of the profound impact that they can have, both positive and negative, on student test anxiety,” Timothy Kremer, executive director of the School Boards Association, said in a statement.

“Six in 10 school psychologists said the Common Core learning standards, which includes state exams for students in third through eighth grades each April, has increased students' anxiety.

“The report contended that the test anxiety is more common at the elementary-school level, saying students more often showed “internalized” symptoms such as excessive worry and withdrawal rather than demonstrating “externalized” symptoms, such as increased irritability, frustration and acting out.”

2. American Test Anxieties Association, A Serious Problem

<http://www.amtaa.org/problem.html>

"Test anxieties rise sharply in grades 2--4, and remain high during middle school and high school. Test anxiety presents a serious academic impairment on all grade levels, from elementary school through higher education. Teenagers tend to rate "schoolwork" and "exams" as the major source of worry and stress in their lives. Although estimates vary, about 20% of students appear to have truly "high" or "severe" anxiety while another 16% of students might be considered to have "moderately high" test anxiety. An estimated 10 million children are affected in North America alone. And test anxieties appear to be increasing in step with the increased national emphasis on standardized testing."

3. Too Much Test Stress? Parents, Experts Discuss High Stakes, Standardized Test Anxiety, WJCT Florida, 4/23/14

<http://news.wjct.org/post/too-much-test-stress-parents-experts-discuss-high-stakes-standardized-test-anxiety>

"For even young children, that stress can manifest itself in physical and psychological ways, said Dr. Wendy Sapolsky of Carithers Pediatric Group. Over the past 20 years, the Jacksonville pediatrician says the number of children she's seen with stress-related illnesses around this time of year has grown. "We've seen increased anxiety over the past five to eight years," she said. "I mean, it's just incredible." Sapolsky said the uptick at her office usually occurs between February and April. During those months, she said she typically sees a new patient each day suffering some level of test-related anxiety, with symptoms ranging from stomach aches to panic attacks." "Sometimes, these kids get so worked up as early as third grade with having to pass the FCAT's to pass third grade, that this time of year we have some children...that have such severe anxiety that we can't get them to school at this time of year. Literally, they will not get out of the car," she said."

"(Natasha) Segool has been studying the links between anxiety in children and high stakes testing for the past six years. A 2009 study she conducted of third-, fourth- and fifth-graders in Michigan found that students reported being significantly more anxious when taking statewide assessments compared to other classroom tests."

"About 11 percent of the children surveyed reported severe psychological and physiological symptoms tied to the assessments."

More from Segool: Segool, Carlson, Goforth, VonDerEmbe, and Barterian, *Psychology in the Schools*, Vol. 50(5), 2013 wileyonlinelibrary.com/journal/pits (peer-reviewed)

"This is the first study to establish that elementary school children experience greater test anxiety about NCLB testing than about typical classroom testing."

"Overall, 25% of students reported increased test anxiety about the NCLB assessment and were reclassified into a higher test anxiety level, with 60% of students remaining stable across testing conditions. The largest shift in test anxiety classification occurred in the number of students (n = 56) who reported low test anxiety about classroom testing and were then reclassified as moderately test-anxious in the high-stakes testing condition.

"Relatively little research has been conducted that directly examines the relationship between student test anxiety and federally mandated NCLB achievement assessments. A number of researchers have examined the perceptions that teachers, parents, and school administrators have about the impact of large-scale testing programs on students. These studies suggest that state testing programs have resulted in increased student anxiety, increased stress, lowered motivation, increased focus on test preparation, and increased job stress and lowered job satisfaction for teachers (Abrams, Pedulla, & Madaus, 2003; Barksdale-Ladd & Thomas, 2000; Jones & Egley, 2004, 2006; Jones et al., 1999). However, these studies are indirect assessments that may have been influenced by the respondents' beliefs,

concerns, or worries about high-stakes assessments. Thus, although these studies provide important data about how these stakeholders perceive the impact of statewide testing programs, there is a need to study the impact of testing programs on children directly.”

“Previous research suggests that test anxiety is associated with impaired test performance and impaired knowledge acquisition in academic skill areas (Sarason, Davidson, Lighthall, Waite, & Ruebush, 1960; Zeidner, 1998). In the current study, students reported significantly more test anxiety in relation to the high-stakes NCLB assessment than to classroom tests.

“These results are consistent with the hypothesis that students perceive high-stakes testing situations as more stressful and anxiety-provoking than typical testing situations that occur as part of the curriculum. Similarly, students reported significantly more cognitive and physiological symptoms of test anxiety about the NCLB assessment.”

“Previous research has demonstrated that test anxiety can have a negative impact on grade point average and that children with high levels of test anxiety are more likely to drop out of school (Cizek & Berg 2006; Hembree, 1988; Spielberger, 1966). In addition, research has demonstrated that test anxiety can reduce motivation in students and heighten levels of stress during exams (Cizek & Berg, 2006; Hembree, 1988, Zeidner, 1998).”

3a “The Decline of Play and Rise in Children's Mental Disorders Peter Grey Jan. 26, 2010

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/freedom-learn/201001/the-decline-play-and-rise-in-childrens-mental-disorders>

“Rates of depression and anxiety among young people in America have been increasing steadily for the past 50 to 70 years. Today, by at least some estimates, five to eight times as many high school and college students meet the criteria for diagnosis of major depression and/or anxiety disorder as was true half a century or more ago.”

“How Coercive Schooling Deprives Young People of Personal Control, Directs Them Toward Extrinsic Goals, and Promotes Anxiety and Depression: During the same half-century or more that free play has declined, school and school-like activities (such as lessons out of school and adult-directed sports) have risen continuously in prominence. Children today spend more hours per day, days per year, and years of their life in school than ever before. More weight is given to tests and grades than ever. ...Our system of constant testing and evaluation in school—which becomes increasingly intense with every passing year—is a system that very clearly substitutes extrinsic rewards and goals for intrinsic ones. It is almost designed to produce anxiety and depression.”

4. NY Assoc. of School Psychologists, Testing Anxiety Tool Kit, Thomas J. Huberty, PhD, NCSP Indiana University

http://www.nyasp.biz/pdf_files/testing_anxiety_toolkit.pdf

“Over the last several years, graduation has come to depend on passing standardized tests. As a consequence, more students are likely to have anxiety when taking such tests and their ability to do their best will be impaired.

5. Johns Hopkins School of Education, The Powerful Impact of Stress, Victoria Tennant. 9/05

<http://education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/strategies/topics/Keeping%20Fit%20for%20Learning/stress.html>

“Teachers and administrators are experiencing an increasing amount of stress with the pressures from *No Child Left Behind* and state testing. Yet, they often fail to recognize that this stress filters down to the students.”

“Frequent symptoms of stress such as low impulse control, difficulty concentrating and irritating behaviors often match the definition of A.D.D./A.D.H.D. “

6. Students 'in Complete Meltdown' Over Exams-James Meikle, The Guardian, 7/15/15

<http://www.theguardian.com/education/2015/jul/04/children-exams-teachers-school-anxiety-nut>

“Teachers in England are seeing unprecedented levels of school-related anxiety, stress and mental health problems among pupils of all age groups and abilities, particularly around test or exam time, according to a new report.”

“Teachers complain that low achievement at tests or exams is resulting in low motivation and low self-esteem. One secondary school teacher at an unnamed school said “self-harming is rife” at key stage 4 (14- to 16-year-olds) and reported that a pupil was hospitalised for three months in a psychiatric ward following a suicide attempt, another nearly starved herself to death and numerous other students “suffered from symptoms that are on the questionnaires that the NHS uses to diagnose depression”.”

““The increase in diagnosis of ADHD (attention deficit hyperactive disorder) has been shown to be linked to the increase in high-stakes testing. Thus it appears that some children are being diagnosed and medicated because the school environment has become less suitable for them, allowing less movement and practical work, and requiring them to sit still for long periods.””

7. The Not-So-Hidden Cause Behind the ADHD Epidemic, New York Times, 10/15/13

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/10/20/magazine/the-not-so-hidden-cause-behind-the-adhd-epidemic.html?_r=0

“The number of diagnoses of Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder has ballooned over the past few decades. Before the early 1990s, fewer than 5 percent of school-age kids were thought to have A.D.H.D. Earlier this year, data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention showed that 11 percent of children ages 4 to 17 had at some point received the diagnosis — and that doesn’t even include first-time diagnoses in adults.”

“Of the 6.4 million kids who have been given diagnoses of A.D.H.D., a large percentage are unlikely to have any kind of physiological difference that would make them more distractible than the average non-A.D.H.D. kid. It’s also doubtful that biological or environmental changes are making physiological differences more prevalent. Instead, the rapid increase in people with A.D.H.D. probably has more to do with sociological factors — changes in the way we school our children, in the way we interact with doctors and in what we expect from our kids.”

8. Are Schools Driving ADHD Diagnosis?, Child Mind Institute, 7/2/13

<http://www.childmind.org/en/posts/articles/2013-7-2-are-schools-driving-rise-adhd-diagnoses>

“Drs. Hinshaw and Scheffler’s team found a correlation between the states with the highest rates of ADHD diagnosis and laws that penalize school districts when students fail. Some of these laws are what they call “consequential accountability statutes”—that is, laws like No Child Left Behind, which make school funding contingent on the number of students who pass standardized tests. Another kind of accountability law passed by many states requires exams for high school seniors to qualify for graduation.”

“When schools are given financial incentives to improve student success rates, students are more likely to be diagnosed with ADHD and given medication to treat it.”

Anecdotal evidence about the damage to our children is overwhelming

9. Test Mania? Parents Opt Out Of Testing For Their Kids Because of Pressure and Anxiety, 10/24/14

Anecdotal evidence shows children are suffering from test induced anxiety. Parents are opting their children out of

the anxiety by refusing the tests for their children.

http://www.cleveland.com/metro/index.ssf/2014/10/test_mania_parents_opt_out_of.html

“Jablonski said her son was so sick with nausea and dizziness last spring that she took him to several doctors for blood and vision tests, even an MRI. Doctors couldn't figure it out. He felt better, Jablonski said, when his school in Elyria finished taking state tests. That experience convinced her that he would not take tests anymore.”

““The current over-use of student test results puts great emphasis on students to 'score well' on any assessment they take,” Prater said. “The mere thought of taking a test provokes anxiety in some students. This becomes heightened when it's time to take the test. The disproportionate importance placed on doing well on tests makes many students, parents, teachers and administrators feel the pressure.”

10. A Tough New Test Spurs Protest and Tears, NY Times, 4/19/13

http://www.nytimes.com/2013/04/19/education/common-core-testing-spurs-outrage-and-protest-among-parents.html?_r=0

“Students at the Hostos-Lincoln Academy in the Bronx blamed the English exams for making them anxious and sick. Teachers at Public School 152 in Manhattan said they had never seen so many blank stares. Parents at the Earth School in the East Village were so displeased that they organized a boycott.”

“Complaints were plentiful: the tests were too long; students were demoralized to the point of tears...”

11. States Listen as Parents Give Rampant Testing an F, NY Times, 11/9/14

<http://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/10/us/states-listen-as-parents-give-rampant-testing-an-f.html>

“Some wept as they described teenagers who take Xanax to cope with test stress, children who refuse to go to school and teachers who retire rather than promote a culture that seems to value testing over learning.”

““My third grader loves school, but I can't get her out of the car this year,” Dawn LaBorde, who has three children in Palm Beach County schools, told the gathering, through tears. Her son, a junior, is so shaken, she said, “I have had to take him to his doctor.” She added: “He can't sleep, but he's tired. He can't eat, but he's hungry.””

12. Parents All Over US 'Opting Out' of Standardized Testing, CNN, 4/24/15

<http://www.cnn.com/2015/04/17/living/parents-movement-opt-out-of-testing-feat/>

““To me we are setting our kids up to fail. The reading passages are three levels above the child's current grade level,” said a teacher and a mom of two who has opted out her kids for the past two years. “Many teachers have posted that their students were crying because they did not have enough time to finish the test and bubbled in random answers.””

13. Children Psychologically Imprisoned? Whistleblower Reveals High Stakes Testing Preparation, Cloaking Inequity, 11/14/13

<http://cloakinginequity.com/2013/11/14/children-psychologically-imprisoned-whistleblower-reveals-high-states-testing-preparation/comment-page-1/>

“The post detailed the allegations of child abuse for the purposes of high-stakes testing at a high-minority, Title I East Austin elementary school near downtown.”

“What the New 3 R's System calls good discipline, is actually punitive ABA. The signs of psychological abuse that I have observed from chronic stress in this system usually begin by age 6 – 8. The most common symptoms begin

with signs of desensitization, anxiety, loss of imagination, loss of spontaneity, loss of humor, regression, irritability, self-injury, inability to concentrate, and dissociation..."

14. 'Our Children Are Being Tampered With': A Teacher Speaks Out on Emotional Effects of High Stakes Testing, NEA Today, Chad Donohue, 4/23/15

<http://neatoday.org/2015/04/23/our-children-are-being-tampered-with-a-teacher-speaks-out-on-emotional-effects-of-high-stakes-testing/>

"Furthermore, I believe that high stakes tests are developmentally inappropriate and emotionally damaging for elementary and middle school children. Having watched my students spend 5 – 8 hours testing in front of computers in recent weeks, I am more convinced of this than ever. As a teacher of twelve and thirteen year olds, I am far more interested in my students' well-being than their national ranking, and their body language alone tells me something is wrong. They look overwhelmed and exhausted. More than ever, I see this disappointment in students. More than ever, I see kids showing signs of depression and anxiety in school. Extreme test anxiety may affect up to [20 percent of school-aged children, while another 18 percent](#) may experience less severe forms of it. [The Anxiety and Depression Association of America](#) warns us that "feelings of anger, fear, helplessness and disappointment are common emotional responses to test anxiety."

15. Truth Report: The Stress Test-How Today's Standardized Tests Impact Health, Performance, and School Culture, 4/24/13

<http://www.teentruth.net/voices-insight/truth-report-the-stress-test/>

High stakes tests put an enormous amount of sustained pressure on administrators and teachers, which then trickles down to students and their families, "says Dr. Stehanie Eberts, who teaches school counseling at Texas State University. As the trained mental health professionals on many school campuses, she says school counselors get a front row seat to the effects of testing season and the stress it creates. "Because these test results often determine how much funding a school will receive and consequently how many teachers will have jobs, the pressure to perform is exerted on the entire school environment. "If you're afraid you're going to lose your job, that pressure is going to be enormous and it creates an environment of anxiety," she explains."

"For students, Dr. Eberts says test anxiety starts as early as 1st grade, though the stakes reach a fever pitch starting in 3rd grade when promotion is often linked to scores on the state test. "

"Testing is such a bad time for schools – it's palpable," she recalls. "I had a lot of middle schoolers come to me because they didn't do well on their tests and they would spiral out of control in a matter of two minutes." Lacking the coping skills to manage this stress sent many of her students into self-doubt and a cycle of negative academic expectations. These "meltdowns" are all too common and have come to be expected. Having worked with adolescents for 25 years, school counselor Steve Paterson can relate."

"Every year there are students who have to take the test in a counselor's office because he or she is stressing out and can't manage to be in a classroom full of students," he explains. "One year in particular, there was a student who came into my office and knocked everything off my table because he was stressing out so badly. We also have students who act out behaviorally after the testing because they just don't know how to handle the decompression of testing being over."

16. State Tests Spark Ire, Analysis, Wall Street Journal, 4/18/13

<http://www.wsj.com/articles/SB10001424127887323309604578431263623255902>

"The kids were exhausted," she said after school on Thursday. "It was the first time where I had kids break down during the test."

"We had a couple of kids who got sick, who started throwing up," he said. "We had one child who went to the bathroom and refuse to leave. We had a number of children who walked out of tests crying."

17. State Sanctioned Child Abuse, Stamford Advocate, 11/15/13

<http://www.stamfordadvocate.com/news/article/Lecker-State-sanctioned-child-abuse-4986416.php>

"...a school culture focused on high-stakes tests is exactly the type of environment that we should avoid for children who experience toxic stress."

"...for children under 8, current policies combining an age-inappropriate curriculum with standardized testing are nothing short of child abuse."

"High-stakes tests impair a student's brain function and mental health. [Cornell University](#) researchers found that the stress associated with high-stakes standardized tests disrupts the function of the brain's prefrontal cortex, affecting memory and attention skills."

"...[Boston College](#) psychology professor [Peter Gray](#) has observed, "Our system of constant testing and evaluation in school -- which becomes increasingly intense with every passing year-- ... very clearly substitutes extrinsic rewards and goals for intrinsic ones. (It) is almost designed to produce anxiety and depression." Indeed, the [National Institute of Health](#) finds that childhood anxiety is on the rise and is now the most prevalent psychological disorder in children and adolescents.

"Mental health professionals report an alarming rise in anxiety-related symptoms, including self-mutilation, coinciding with New York's Common Core implementation."

18. The Case Against Standardized Testing, Harvard Political Review, 5/14/15

<http://harvardpolitics.com/united-states/case-standardized-testing/>

"This amounted to almost eight hours of testing in a single week for Neely-Randall's fifth graders. One student couldn't handle the stress of all of these tests and broke down in the middle of one. "She had a complete meltdown," Neely-Randall told the HPR. "And I could do nothing to help her, I couldn't help her with the test. I could just let her take a little break then, but then she was going to run out of time, and she was watching the clock, she knew.""

"She tried to show them a practice PARCC exam, but when she asked her students to write down what they thought about the test, one student wrote, "I feel like we have to take all these tests and if I pass the tests I live and if I don't, I die." This was extremely alarming for Neely-Randall. "I was horrified. I mean, I really was horrified. Because they were just freaking out.""

"A [report](#) from the Center for American Progress substantiates Schaeffer's claim, demonstrating that urban high school students spend as much as 266 percent more time taking standardized tests than their suburban counterparts do."

"“Most kids I know are so anxious about the high-stakes consequences of these tests right now that they hate school, but yet they can be really engaged if we engage them through music or through art or through projects.”"

"“[The test questions] are not age appropriate, they're riddled with mistakes. There have been mistakes through the entire test. ... There's no accountability for the test maker." Neely-Randall agrees, saying the tests are "developmentally inappropriate—and actually I would go so far as to say abusive—to students.”"

Overtesting may be harming our most vulnerable children the most

19. Early Academic Training Produces Long-term Harm, Psychology Today, Peter Gray, 5/5/15

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/freedom-learn/201505/early-academic-training-produces-long-term-harm>

“Many preschool and kindergarten teachers have told me that they are extremely upset—some to the point of being ready to resign—by the increased pressure on them to teach academic skills to little children and regularly test them on such skills. They can see firsthand the unhappiness generated, and they suspect that the children would be learning much more useful lessons through playing, exploring, and socializing, as they did in traditional nursery schools and kindergartens. Their suspicions are well validated by research studies.”

“A number of well-controlled studies have compared the effects of academically oriented early education classrooms with those of play-based classrooms (some of which are reviewed [here\(link is external\)](#), in an article by Nancy Carlsson-Paige, GERALYN McLaughlin, and Joan Almon).[1] The results are quite consistent from study to study: Early academic training somewhat increases children’s immediate scores on the specific tests that the training is aimed at (no surprise), but these initial gains wash out within 1 to 3 years and, at least in some studies, are eventually reversed. Perhaps more tragic than the lack of long-term academic advantage of early academic instruction is evidence that such instruction can produce long-term harm, especially in the realms of social and emotional development.”

20. Common Core Testing Makes Children Vomit, Washington Times, 11/25/13

<http://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2013/nov/25/common-core-testing-makes-children-vomit/>

““We know that many children cried during or after testing, and others vomited or lost control of their bowels or bladders,” the letter reads. “Others simply gave up. One teacher reported that a student kept banging his head on the desk, and wrote, ‘This is too hard,’ and ‘I can’t do this,’ throughout his test booklet.” The letter also states that overall test scores dropped 31 percent statewide and have contributed to the achievement gap. “We know that the tests have caused the achievement gap to widen as the scores of economically disadvantaged students plummeted, and that parents are reporting that low-scoring children feel like failures,” the letter said.”

21. US DOE Continues to Force Test Failure On Children with Special Needs and ELL Students, Nancy Bailey, 7/1/15

<http://nancyebailey.com/2015/07/01/u-s-doe-continues-to-force-test-failure-on-children-with-special-needs-and-ell-students/>

“...U.S. Dept. of Education is insisting that the New York Board of Education continue to force all students with disabilities, except for those with the severest disabilities, to take the tests matching their chronological age, not their developmental age, ignoring their cognitive disabilities.”

22. Standardized Test for Special Needs Students Eliminated, Oklahoma, 4/24/14

<http://www.kten.com/story/25336068/standardized-test-for-special-needs-students-eliminated>

“Laura Holt’s daughter has been diagnosed with an intellectual disability and says taking the standardized test hurts her health.

“High anxiety, caused depression, hives, vomiting, asthma attacks, having to be removed from school,” Holt said. Tuck says other students have had similar experiences during the test. “They’re frustrated, they’re crying. Taking their test, they’re sitting there crying,” Tuck said.”

23. Teachers Challenge Testing For Special Needs Students, Miami Herald, 2/26/14

<http://www.miamiherald.com/news/local/education/article1960790.html>

“While her 11-year-old son Ethan lay dying last month, Andrea Rediske had to convince the boy’s school district he could not take the state tests. Ethan’s teacher made daily visits to assess his progress — even when he was in hospice care. “Seriously?” Rediske wrote in a Feb. 4 email to Orange County School Board member Rich Roach. “Why is Ethan Rediske not meeting his sixth-grade hospital-homebound curriculum requirements? BECAUSE HE IS IN A MORPHINE COMA. We expect him to go any day.” The boy died three days later.”

“11-year-old Luis Medina, who is blind and in a persistent vegetative state. In the video, a teacher shows Luis a series of drawings and asks him to answer questions. The boy, who has suffered brain damage, cannot understand or communicate. “Right now, how they are testing my child is not the right way,” said his mother, Maria Rivera. “He cannot tell you what he thinks or what he sees.” State Education Commissioner Pam Stewart defended the use of assessments for all students.”

““You have kids with special needs who have to sit for a test and are held accountable to the same standards as other children,” she said. “The burden and the pressure and these kids is astronomical.” Sabrina Berger, a Pasco County teacher who has taught profoundly disabled students in for 18 years, spent Wednesday testing a child who had to be given a cookie after each answer to help keep him focused. “They’re telling us to do things against what we’ve always done, what I know is right,” she said.”

24. Regent: Testing Rules Unfair for Special Needs Kids, New York, 9/8/14

<http://www.lohud.com/story/news/education/hall-monitor/2014/09/07/assessing-special-needs-students/15267085/>

“But students with pretty severe disabilities have been forced to take standardized tests at their grade level — even if they are not capable of doing the work and have no chance of passing. The result, experts have told me, is that many students are devastated by their experience. “I’ve watched with anguish the disservice this unconscionable system has done to hard-working students,” said Lori Decarlo, co-president of the Council of New York Special Education Administrators.”

25. Childhood Anxiety from Adult Shenanigans, Wendy Sheard, J.D., Ph.D., 1/1/15

<https://wendasheard.wordpress.com/2015/04/01/anxiety/>

“Whose bright idea was it to sit children in chairs and desks for hours at a time, many days during the school year, forcing them to answer questions designed by national and multinational corporations to measure the performance of teachers and schools? A particular child has difficulty focusing for long periods of time? Give that child an even longer period of time to complete the standardized test. Another child has a cognitive disability so severe that everyone knows the child can’t possibly pass the test? Make the child take the test anyway. Worried about the tests interrupting school’s normal schedule for weeks and months at a stretch? Stay calm and carry on. Imagine how children who are living in the standardized testing shadows of No Child Left Behind are feeling this year. Even first graders are taking state-mandated tests. Little first graders, some with all their baby teeth intact. According to one [media report](#), teachers say that some young children have thrown up and cried during standardized testing.”

“For instance, the Common Core State Standards website includes a [two-page document](#) about applying the standards to children with disabilities. Witness this last paragraph of that document:

Some students with the most significant cognitive disabilities will require substantial supports and accommodations to have meaningful access to certain standards in both instruction and assessment, based on their communication and academic needs. These supports and accommodations should ensure that students receive access to multiple means of learning and opportunities to demonstrate knowledge, but retain the rigor and high expectations of the

Common Core State Standards.

Wow. I had to read that twice. Does the paragraph really advise educators to apply the same “rigor and high expectations” to all children, even those with the most significant cognitive disabilities? Do you think some children with the most significant cognitive disabilities might feel anxiety as a result?

And what about children who are functioning intellectually one or two or more grade levels ahead of their age mates? Why are the Common Core State Standards presumed to apply to all students, when some students are ready and eager for higher standards? I thought we were in the 21st Century, complete with technology available to help individualize various aspects of education for those in need of individualization. I thought we had sufficient common sense and brain research to know that different children have different minds.”

26. NEA Launches Campaign to End 'Toxic Testing', 7/14

<http://www.nea.org/home/59747.htm>

[Do “no-excuses” schools create damaging “toxic stress” in children?, 12/12/13](https://teacherbiz.wordpress.com/2013/12/12/do-no-excuses-schools-create-damaging-toxic-stress-in-children/)

<https://teacherbiz.wordpress.com/2013/12/12/do-no-excuses-schools-create-damaging-toxic-stress-in-children/>

“In fact, those same reformers are often proponents of “no-excuses” charter schools that force their students to conform to very strict rules and behavior codes, many of which have been described by teachers and parents as unreasonable and even abusive. At such schools, children (and teachers, for that matter) are under such stress to produce high test scores that the quest to perform well on standardized tests often supersedes the humanity, compassion, and empathy that should be central to a child’s upbringing, education, and overall development.

Children who cannot comply with the “no-excuses” model are often expelled, “counseled out,” or otherwise forced to seek education elsewhere—and often return to the very neighborhood schools from which charter operators suggest children should flee. Children who choose not to comply often seek educational alternatives willingly, and their voluntary attrition is typically not reflected in the statistics and graduation rates “no excuses” schools like to advertise.”

“No-excuses” schools with authoritarian disciplinary policies, however, can actually perpetuate or create toxic stress in children, and as a result, such schools effectively contribute to the problem they claim they want to fix. Thus, in their seeming quests to close the “achievement gap” and address the problem of poverty, they actually create the toxic stress that precludes children from developing both emotionally and intellectually to their full potential.”

As a result, they accidentally skipped questions they couldn’t return to, which counted against their scores. “The test was not even going to yield good results,” she said. “So now I’m wasting time for a test that isn’t going to have any reliability or validity.” In one full day, she managed to test just four students while another teacher monitored the rest of the class. When she realized how much class time she was losing to the test—which was to be given two more times through the year—she refused to continue.”

More From Segool: Similarly, Hill and Wigfield (1984) suggested that between two and three children in typical classrooms, or approximately 10% of children, are highly test-anxious and experience impairments in test performance as a result. Alternatively, Turner, Beidel, Hughes, and Turner (1993) found that the prevalence of high test anxiety among African American elementary school children may be as high as 41%.

27. Physical Education Takes a Hit: Schools’ Emphasis on Testing is Making Kids Sick, TruthOut, 5/6/15

<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/30582-physical-education-takes-a-hit-testing-mania-is-making-us-kids-sick#>

“In fact, since the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act in 2001, 44 percent of school administrators admit that

they've cut physical education or recess to focus on test prep. This policy shift did not rankle the Bush administration; similarly, Arne Duncan's Department of Education has not uttered a peep to contest it, instead focusing on Common Core testing rather than most other pedagogical matters."

28. These Days, School Lunches Are More Like 15 Minutes, NPR, Eric Westervelt, 12/4/13

<http://www.npr.org/sections/thesalt/2013/12/04/248511038/these-days-school-lunch-hours-are-more-like-15-minutes>

"Julia Bauscher, who is president of a national advocacy group called the [School Nutrition Association](#), says administrators are under intense pressure to increase instruction time and boost standardized test scores. The lunch period is often the first place they look to steal time."

"[They've] got to get in this many instructional minutes, and this is our expected annual yearly progress on the test," she says. "You've got two important and competing priorities there."

29. Kindergarteners Ringing the Bell for Play Inside the Classroom, NY Times, Mokoto Rich, 6/9/15

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/06/10/education/out-of-the-books-in-kindergarten-and-into-the-sandbox.html?hp&action=click&pgtype=Homepage&module=second-column-region®ion=top-news&WT.nav=top-news&_r=1

"As American classrooms have focused on raising test scores in math and reading, an outgrowth of the federal [No Child Left Behind](#) law and interpretations of the new Common Core standards, even the youngest students have been affected, with more formal lessons and less time in sandboxes."

"Across the country, many schools in recent years have curtailed physical and art education in favor of longer blocks for reading and math instruction to help improve test scores. The harder work even began in kindergarten."

"Most recently, more than 40 states have adopted the Common Core, standards for reading and math that in many cases are much more difficult than previous guidelines. In some school districts, 5-year-olds are doing what first or even second graders once did, and former kindergarten staples like dramatic play areas and water or sand tables have vanished from some classrooms, while worksheets and textbooks have appeared."

30. Why So Many Kids Can't Sit Still in School, Angela Hanscom, pediatric occupational therapist, 7/8/14

http://tablet.washingtonpost.com/rweb/top/why-so-many-kids-cant-sit-still-in-school-today/2015/01/04/8a3399f2cdb180ae6c5b7345f5be6238e_story.html?tid=kindle-app

"Over the past decade, more and more children are being coded as having attention issues and possibly ADHD. A local elementary teacher tells me that at least eight of her twenty-two students have trouble paying attention on a good day. At the same time, children are expected to sit for longer periods of time. In fact, even kindergarteners are being asked to sit for thirty minutes during circle time at some schools."

"The problem: children are constantly in an upright position these days. It is rare to find children rolling down hills, climbing trees, and spinning in circles just for fun. Merry-go-rounds and teeter-totters are a thing of the past. Recess times have shortened due to increasing educational demands, and children rarely play outdoors due to parental fears, liability issues, and the hectic schedules of modern-day society. Let's face it: Children are not nearly moving enough, and it is really starting to become a problem."

31. K&Preschool Teachers: Last Stand in War on Childhood, Psychology Today, Peter Gray, 7/8/15

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/freedom-learn/201507/k-preschool-teachers-last-stand-in-war-childhood>

"I've heard passionate descriptions of struggles to preserve play. They are battling the effects of No Child Left Behind, and now Common Core, which have trickled down from the higher grades to K and preschool. They are

battling policy makers who know nothing about childhood, who ignore the piles of research showing the value of play and the long-term harm of early academic training (see [here](#) and [here](#)), and who see standardized test scores as the end-all and be-all of [education](#). They are battling administrators, who either have fallen for the pro-testing propaganda or are cynically pretending they believe it in order to preserve their high-salaried positions. They are battling teachers in the grades above, who tell them that their job is to prepare little children for the next stage in school by teaching them to sit still, do worksheets, and suppress their urges to play and explore. They are battling parents, who have come to believe that their 3-, 4-, and 5-year-olds will never get into Harvard if they “just play” in preschool and kindergarten. Sometimes the battle is too hard, so they quit, or worse: they give in and do what they know is wrong.”

32. Why Kids Really Need Recess, Parenting, Denene Millner (2012?)

<http://www.parenting.com/article/why-kids-really-need-recess>

“Students most likely to get little or no time outside, says Dr. Barros, are those in low-income, urban neighborhoods where play areas are scarce—and teachers are busy trying to raise their students' test scores to meet strict federal No Child Left Behind standards.”

Test stress actually makes learning harder and test results unreliable.

33. Johns Hopkins School of Education, The Powerful Impact of Stress, Victoria Tennant. 9/05

<http://education.jhu.edu/PD/newhorizons/strategies/topics/Keeping%20Fit%20for%20Learning/stress.html>

“It's normal to have a touch of apprehension and butterflies in the stomach before a test. This is the positive side of the stress curve that actually enhances performance. However, when the anxiety gets out of control and crosses to the other side of the curve, performance plummets. Recently a fourth-grader who had just finished taking a state math test said, “The worst part was dividing fractions. I got so anxious I thought I would faint.”

“High anxiety disrupts students' concentration and results in low test scores”

34. Why Stress Inhibits Learning, William R. Stixrudd, Ph.D., LearnNow.org

<http://learnnow.org/topics/stress/reduce-stress-to-increase-learning>

“(Test stress) is a big deal, because prolonged stress can profoundly undermine learning, mental health and brain development in young people.”

35. Truth Report: The Stress Test-How Today's Standardized Tests Impact Health, Performance, and School Culture, 4/24/13

<http://www.teentruth.net/voices-insight/truth-report-the-stress-test/>

High stakes tests put an enormous amount of sustained pressure on administrators and teachers, which then trickles down to students and their families, “says Dr. Stehanie Eberts, who teaches school counseling at Texas State University.

“For students, Dr. Eberts says test anxiety starts as early as 1st grade, though the stakes reach a fever pitch starting in 3rd grade when promotion is often linked to scores on the state test. “Younger students internalize the anxiety and as they get older they can become more apathetic about the school environment,” she warns.”

“No matter what a student’s age, when it comes to the cognitive function needed during testing, anxiety and stress become our biggest foes, making basic recall of facts and information difficult and even impaired.”

“Having worked with adolescents for 25 years, school counselor Steve Paterson can relate.” The bottom line, he says, is that anytime students act out, “their learning, retention and test taking strategies are impacted negatively.””

For more information on Parents Across America, please visit our website at www.parentsacrossamerica.org or email us at info@parentsacrossamerica.org