



PAA POSITION PAPER

PARENTS STAND UP AGAINST TEST STRESS

Updated January 2016

Across our nation, children of all ages are showing a jump in test anxiety. As high-stakes standardized tests have multiplied, growing percentages of students have begun to report test-related stress. More are seeking test-stress counseling. Media reports of psychological and physiological symptoms tied to testing have increased.

Please see our fact sheet, [Test Stress and Our Children](#), and our [documentation paper](#).

Some students are able to manage the pressures of high-stakes testing. Others are overwhelmed. Parents, teachers, administrators, and mental health professionals report symptoms that include 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. The stress that high-stakes testing creates is thus sabotaging learning for many students.

Test stress does 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 standardized tests, and most likely to attend struggling schools where the focus on test results is particularly intense. 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 cause of the stress must be addressed. **No child should be exposed to prolonged, intense stress**, which can inhibit brain function and take a toll on mental health.

On the following page, PAA recommends some solutions to overtesting.

To learn more about testing or PAA, please visit www.parentsacrossamerica.org or email us at info@parentsacrossamerica.org.

WHAT TO DO ABOUT TEST STRESS IN CHILDREN

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.

Rely instead on regular teacher-generated reports of student progress which

- look at students' work over time and across all areas of learning and growth,
- are prepared by experienced, qualified adults who personally observe each student, and
- are accessible to 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 the 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.