



FOOD FOR THOUGHT AS WE APPROACH APRIL TESTING...

With the advent of the standards movement, states began mandating yearly assessments of students in their schools, and with these examinations came a higher level of accountability for teachers and administrators. Educators were now forced to answer for the performance of their students on standardized tests. Research demonstrates that the effects of this transition on faculty have been widespread. A study by Dr. George Perreault (2002), in which he interviewed teachers about the effects of high-stakes testing in their classrooms, found many traits that changed in educators' schools. Perreault states that pressure is a constant in an environment of state mandated testing, with the majority of teachers interviewed being able to give the exact date testing would be completed. In a study of counselors in a southern state's schools, Thorn and Mulvenon (2002) reported that the participants identified the stresses shown by teachers due to state mandated tests. These counselors claimed that, during the weeks before and of testing, they spent the majority of their time dealing with teacher and student stress reduction. Educators also spoke of numerous changes in policies and curriculum in response to the high-stakes examinations, with one stating, "we were told, 'If it ain't on the test, don't teach it'" (p. 706). Perreault also recalls an instance in which a principal directed teachers in his school not to introduce any new material for six weeks leading up to the test. Another theme that came out of these interviews was a feeling of powerlessness and defeat coming from teachers. Teachers claimed that they were never sure if what they were doing was in the best interest of the student's success.

Brett Jones (2007) furthers this point in his article on the effects of high-stakes testing. Though he does claim that ninety percent of teachers believed that educators should be held accountable for their teaching and student performance, Jones states, "There is strong evidence that high-stakes testing has coerced teachers into aligning their curriculum to the areas tested" (p. 69). Teachers succumb to the pressures of administrators and the public and forego teaching content that will not show up on the state mandated assessments in order to better prepare their students to pass the examinations. Since these high-stakes tests primarily cover reading, writing, and mathematics, subjects such as science, social studies, art, music, and physical education are typically given less instructional time. A study by Fritchett and Heafner (2010) reports that English/language arts and mathematics took up nearly 16 hours of instructional time weekly, while only 2.9 hours was devoted to social studies and only 2.75 hours was devoted to science weekly. Wayne Au (2007), in his study on the effects of high-stakes testing on curricular control, found that there is a "significant relationship between the implementation of high-stakes testing and changes in the content of a curriculum, the structure of knowledge contained within the content, and the types of pedagogy associated with communication of that content" (p. 262). Au also claims that participants in his study reported curricular narrowing to tested subject areas and the elimination of non-tested content.