

*****NEWS RELEASE*******FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE****HIGH-STAKES TESTS FOR STUDENTS OFTEN FAIL TO MAKE THE GRADE,
NATIONAL ANALYSIS FINDS**

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The Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSSL) would like to call your attention to *The Inevitable Corruption of Indicators and Educators Through High-Stakes Testing*, released by the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice

EAST LANSING, Mich. (Friday, March 18, 2005)— America’s public schools are setting goals and making harmful, irreversible decisions based on test results that in an increasing number of cases can’t be trusted, said an independent study from the Education Policy Research Unit at Arizona State University.

The report, made possible by a grant from the Great Lakes Center for Education Research and Practice, determined that the pressure of high-stakes tests is forcing school districts to take short cuts to avoid being labeled as failing for not meeting certain benchmarks. As a result, their scores are subject to corruption.

“Policy makers have oversold the public on the notion that high-stakes test scores are the best way to hold schools accountable,” said Teri Moblo, director of the Great Lakes Center. “Because of No Child Left Behind and other measures, school districts know that the results of one or two tests determine if they are considered successful. This creates enormous pressure on educators and their students, because long-term decisions are being made based on scores that can’t be trusted.”

David Berliner and Sharon Nichols, co-authors of the report, *The Inevitable Corruption of Indicators and Educators Through High-Stakes Testing*, point to examples of how unbridled pressure to reach unrealistic goals, whether in the boardroom, on the playing field, or in our own government, can inevitably lead to a “beat-the-system” mentality.

“Now we see this kind of mentality seeping into our schools, where future generations are training merely to beat the system,” Berliner said. “Learning subject matter in depth is no longer the goal of schools in high-stakes states. We are witnessing proof of a well-

known social science law, which basically says the greater the pressure to perform at a certain level, the more likely people will find a way to distort and corrupt the system to achieve favorable results.”

Dr. Berliner suggests scrapping high-stakes tests and building an accountability system that is less inviting to cheating and distortions, and better measures students’ and schools’ achievement. A second report on high-stakes testing commissioned by the Great Lakes Center due out in the coming weeks will look at the relationship between the pressures to succeed on high-stakes tests in a particular state, and whether that pressure actually does improve student learning.

In this study, however, the researchers looked at other effects that high-stakes tests have on our nation’s school systems. Hundreds of news articles about high-stakes testing were examined. “Because it would be impossible to comprehensively catalogue every incident where high-stakes testing led to serious problems, our survey seems only to have uncovered the tip of the iceberg,” said Berliner.

Some of the findings included:

- Teachers’ and administrators’ inability to be flexible about test administration meant a 14-year-old student whose brother was recently murdered was not allowed to be excused from a test;
- Eighty percent of North Carolina’s elementary school teachers report they spent more than 20 percent of their total teaching time practicing for high-stakes tests;
- In New York, city school officials were accused of pushing thousands of students out of high school and into high school equivalency programs. Students who enrolled in such programs did not count as dropouts and didn’t have to pass the Regents’ exams necessary for a high school diploma; and
- A Georgia science teacher estimated 10 percent of the questions on the science section lacked a “best” answer because of errors in the information provided to students. State administrators acknowledged the errors even as some students failed to receive a high school diploma because they didn’t pass the tests.

“Teachers are desperate to help their students and schools succeed. We found example after example where teachers worked very hard to help students from challenged schools raise their scores, but in the end they were still labeled as failing,” said Berliner.

Drs. Berliner and Nichols identified 10 trends that outline the consequences of high-stakes testing, which ultimately all negatively impact the quality of education for our nation’s children. The trends are:

- Administrator and Teacher Cheating;
- Student Cheating;
- Exclusion of Low-Performance Students from Testing;

- Misrepresentation of Student Dropouts;
- Teaching to the Test;
- Narrowing the Curriculum;
- Conflicting Accountability Ratings;
- Questions about the Meaning of Proficiency;
- Declining Teacher Morale; and
- Score Reporting Errors.

The mission of the Great Lakes Center is to identify, develop, support, publish, and widely disseminate empirically sound research on education policy and practices with the explicit goal of improving the quality of public education for all students within the Great Lakes Region.

Find this document on the web at:

<http://www.asu.edu/educ/epsl/EPRU/documents/EPSTL-0503-101-EPRU.pdf>

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The Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU) conducts original research, provides independent analyses of research and policy documents, and facilitates educational innovation. EPRU facilitates the work of leading academic experts in a variety of disciplines to help inform the public debate about education policy issues.

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The Education Policy Studies Laboratory (EPSL) at Arizona State University offers high quality analyses of national education policy issues and provides an analytical resource for educators, journalists, and citizens. It includes the Arizona Education Policy Initiative (AEPI), the Commercialism in Education Research Unit (CERU), the Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU), and the Language Policy Research Unit (LPRU). The EPSL is directed by Professor Alex Molnar.

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