

Student Testing

The American Federation of Teachers has, for many years, been supportive of quality standardized assessment that is fair and timely, and that informs and supports instruction. When used appropriately, assessments are a valuable tool in improving education for all children. Standardized tests can provide useful data about student learning. When aligned with strong standards and curriculum, for example, test scores can help diagnose student strengths and weaknesses, and can help identify “holes” or “gaps” in the curriculum and standards. Assessment data can trigger important interventions such as extra help for struggling students or professional development for teachers.

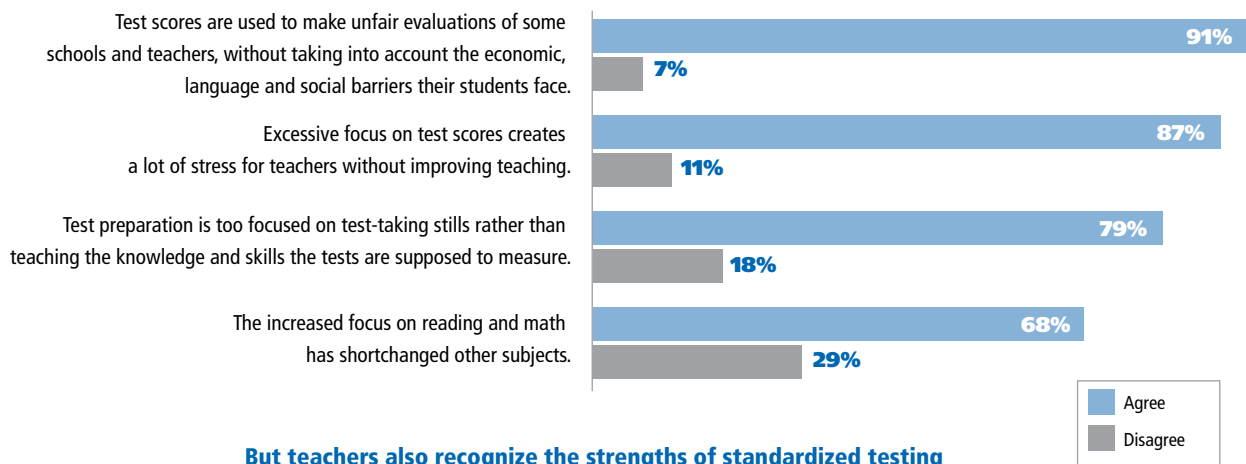
We believe that:

- Appropriate, high-quality, responsible student testing must support and enhance teaching and learning and must be linked to instruction, which means teachers should be involved at all stages of the test development process.
- Testing is an integral—although not exclusive—part of a standards-based educational system. As such, tests should be based on strong state standards, should be tied directly to the curriculum and should define appropriate levels of acceptable performance.
- States’ testing practices should be monitored to eliminate over-testing; to check that standards are driving what’s tested, not the reverse; and to ensure alignment among assessments and other key aspects of a standards-based educational system (such as standards, curricula and professional development).

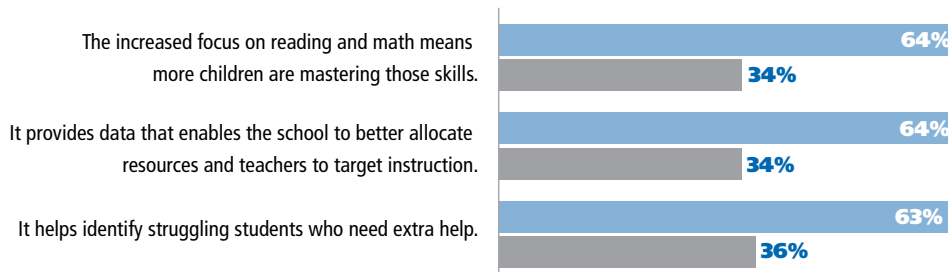
Tests should not be used to determine “winners” or “losers.” They should show where more work is needed. Tests are misused when they are the sole determinant of student promotion; they are misleading if passing scores are arbitrarily set, and unfair if they’re not closely tied to curricula. No child’s future should depend on a single test. Other evidence must be included in such decisions.

What AFT Members Think*

Teachers know the problems with standardized testing



But teachers also recognize the strengths of standardized testing



* Source: Peter D. Hart Research Associates, Inc., January 2008, 708 AFT Teachers surveyed, error: +/-3.7%

“Tests, if they are fair and accurate, and aligned with a rich curriculum, can play an important role in holding teachers, administrators and schools accountable for much of student achievement. But the narrow numerical measures of NCLB benefit no one, least of all the children they were supposed to help.”

—Randi Weingarten, AFT PRESIDENT
NATIONAL CONVENTION, 2008

In Practice

Norfolk Federation of Teachers

Norfolk, Va., has successfully implemented assessment as a tool to inform instruction. Monthly assessments facilitate the early identification of academic needs and opportunities for individual students. After monthly assessments in reading, writing, math, science and social studies, committees of teacher leaders in each subject, guidance counselors and administrators review the results. Based on the results, teachers who have attained positive results are identified as model teachers for others to observe, and struggling students are identified and targeted for additional support. For more information, contact Marian Flickinger, President of Norfolk Federation of Teachers, at nft4261p@aol.com.

Washington Teachers' Union (WTU)

The Washington Teachers' Union organized a series of teacher focus groups that involved the school system's chief of data and accountability. The teachers in the focus groups said they wanted changes made to the testing calendar and quicker test results, and they highlighted areas where the tests did not align to standards. The administration responded with better test dates and faster turnaround of test results, and is working to clarify what students need to know and when they need to know it. For more information, contact Dorothy Egbufor, Director of Professional Issues for the Washington Teachers' Union, at degbufor@wtulocal6.org.

Resources

The Appropriate Use of Student Assessment (June 2008)

In this brochure, the AFT advocates on behalf of teachers and their students for sound assessment policies and practices that are aligned to standards and curriculum. www.aft.org/pubs-reports/downloads/teachers/assessment_use.pdf

Smart Testing: Let's Get It Right (July 2006)

According to this 2006 report on statewide testing, most states have made progress in developing clear grade-by-grade standards, but many have not aligned their high-stakes math, reading and science tests with a strong set of content standards. www.aft.org/pubs-reports/downloads/teachers/Testingbrief.pdf

Where We Stand: Standards-Based Assessment and Accountability (June 2003)

This booklet contains resolutions on standards and assessments passed at the 2002 AFT convention. Also included are questions and answers, background information and back-

Texas AFT

Leaders at Texas AFT engaged teachers, parents and other stakeholders in a organized fight against the confusing, duplicative and inappropriate use of testing through the “Reclaiming Your Classroom” campaign. Highlights of the campaign included: asking teachers to clock instructional time spent on benchmarking, test preparation, test administration and other aspects of testing; working to build public awareness of the amount of classroom time spent on testing; and convening a forum on testing and accountability, which included the release of a Texas AFT paper that is being used in this legislative session (a link to this paper is included in the “Resources” section below). For more information, contact Eric Hartman, Texas AFT Director of Government Relations, at hartoftex@aol.com.

Making Data Work for You

As mentioned earlier, AFT advocates for the use of test data to inform and improve instruction. To serve this purpose, we have developed “Making Data Work for You,” an AFT professional development course designed to help educators become savvy consumers of data. The course was developed by the AFT and a number of affiliates, and is designed to provide participants with the language, knowledge and tools to make informed changes on a number of fronts. For more information, contact Heidi Glidden at hglidden@aft.org.

ground reading. www.aft.org/pubs-reports/downloads/teachers/StandAssessRes.pdf

Game Plan (March 2007)

This article describes what a Smart Testing program looks like in Norfolk, Virginia. www.aft.org/pubs-reports/downloads/teachers/gameplan.pdf

Assessing Student Performance

This section of the AFT's Web site describes the AFT's position on student assessment and provides resources. www.aft.org/topics/sbr/assess.htm

Beyond TAKS (and NCLB): Putting Texas School Accountability Back on Track (Oct. 2008)

Released at a testing forum in October 2008, this paper from Texas AFT provides recommendations for implementing a fair accountability system to replace the current system in Texas. <http://docs.texasaft.org/legislative/TestReformForumPaper100208.pdf>