

*High-Stakes Testing and Student Achievement:
Are High-Stakes Tests Helping or Hurting America's
Children?*

MAPP Discussion Paper #3

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Executive Summary

In this paper, we investigate the effects of high-stakes testing on student achievement. Testing has been a common practice in the United States for a number of years to measure student achievement, but standardized testing has existed for only a few decades, and high-stakes testing only began in the 1980s. The implementation of high-stakes testing has increased nationally since 2001, when President Bush took office and introduced No Child Left Behind, a bill that incorporated testing similar to the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS) exam that was given while he was governor. No Child Left Behind holds students, teachers, and schools accountable for student performance on the tests. The legislation passed with bipartisan support, but now many supporters have changed their minds because high-stakes testing has not created the significant achievement gains promised.

In theory, high-stakes testing is very attractive – holding students accountable for their own test scores will increase pressure, helping the students to improve achievement; however the available data indicate that accountability pressure does not work the same way for all students. We had originally hoped to conduct a meta-analysis on the relationship between high-stakes testing and student achievement, but a dearth of available high-level statistical research has forced us to conduct a literature review. We searched numerous databases for available research, finding studies that utilized several methodologies, although the bulk of the information was low-level statistical research. Overall, we conclude that high-stakes testing does not have the intended positive effect on student achievement; our research indicates that testing has no overall effect on student achievement. More high-level statistical analysis is needed on this topic for reauthorization of the No Child Left Behind Act to have any statistical basis. Alternative methods of measurement may prove more effective indicators of student achievement and better sources on which policymakers may base decisions.