

# To What End?: The Impact of High-Stakes Testing on Student Learning

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## Introduction:

This project examines the impact of testing on student learning in Deer Park Union Free School District (DPUFSD). As the amount of testing in New York State has increased, and the impact of that testing in determination of school effectiveness and student learning has also increased, a review of how testing impacts student learning was felt to be a topic of interest for the district. For this study a survey was administered to all instructional and administrative staff. Discussion of survey data within the larger findings of the research literature follows presentation of the survey data.

## The testing regimen in New York State:

- The emphasis and importance of standardized testing as a major indicator of student learning has increased over time. Impacts of standardized testing have expanded from students, to districts, and staff members.
- The implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) explicitly tied the implementation of high-stakes, standardized testing programs to the continuance of federal funding eligibility for all states.
- The implementation of the Race To The Top (RTTT) initiative in 2009 further broadened the impact of high-stakes testing in New York State. Qualification for RTTT funds required implementation of a teacher evaluation framework that utilizes student test performance as a sizeable portion of a teacher's overall rating (typically 40% for a teacher who teaches a majority of courses that terminate in a standardized assessment).

## Terminology:

**Testing:** A summative learning exercise designed to measure what a student does and does not know about a particular body of knowledge.

**Standardized testing:** Any testing situation where the content and administration of the exam is designed to be uniformly applied to all students who take the test (e.g. NYS Regents Examination).

**High-stakes testing:** Any testing situation where the performance of a population of students on the test results is connected to a specific consequence for students, teachers, administrators, or districts.

## Methodology:

- The data presented here is the result of a survey administered to the instructional and administrative staff of DPUFSD.
- Respondents were asked to indicate how strongly they agreed or disagreed with a series of statements related to testing.
- A five-point, Likert-type scale was employed to enable scoring responses, with a score of 1 indicating strong disagreement with a provided statement, a score of 3 indicating neutrality, and a score of 5 indicating strong agreement. Participants were also offered the option of providing any additional comments that they had on the topic.
- 151 teachers (out of a total of approximately 350) and 17 administrators (out of a total of approximately 34) submitted responses.
- The aggregated data, selected comments from participants, and a comparison of teacher and administrator responses are presented in the Results.
- Scores of 1 and 2 are interpreted as indicating disagreement with a particular statement, scores of 4 and 5 are interpreted as indicating agreement, and a score of 3 is interpreted as indicating neutrality.

## Results:

Table 1: DPUFSD Teacher Survey Responses

Criteria	Average Agreement Index Score	Response Frequencies				
		1	2	3	4	5
Assessment serves an important pedagogical function when used correctly.	3.75	0.04	0.05	0.07	0.38	0.46
The amount of instructional time spent on preparing my students for assessment has increased over the course of my career.	3.86	0.03	0.01	0.07	0.18	0.71
Standardized assessment is a valid indicator of student learning if the data it generates is used appropriately.	2.89	0.10	0.36	0.19	0.28	0.07
The data that standardized assessment generates is being used appropriately by district decision makers.	2.27	0.25	0.43	0.23	0.07	0.03
Mandated assessment requires financial and material resources that could be better used in other aspects of educating district students.	3.80	0.01	0.03	0.05	0.24	0.68
Mandated assessment influences the instructional choices that I make.	3.87	0.03	0.03	0.05	0.38	0.51
Mandated assessments have negatively impacted my curriculum.	3.51	0.04	0.09	0.21	0.26	0.40
I am confident that the performance of my students on mandated assessments will be an accurate indicator of my ability to teach my subject.	2.17	0.54	0.28	0.13	0.03	0.02
There is no need for adequate professional development to be able to use the data from assessment to inform my instruction.	2.64	0.17	0.34	0.30	0.16	0.04
The use of standardized assessment data in staff evaluation will accurately separate teachers based on their instructional effectiveness.	2.08	0.58	0.33	0.06	0.01	0.01
I am in agreement with the role that mandated assessment plays in the state's teacher evaluation framework as it pertains to the district's APPR agreement.	2.27	0.66	0.21	0.09	0.03	0.01
The emphasis given to mandated assessments has negatively affected my perspective on being a teacher.	3.48	0.08	0.08	0.19	0.23	0.43

Table 2: DPUFSD Administrator Survey Responses

Criteria	Average Agreement Index Score	Response Frequencies				
		1	2	3	4	5
Assessment serves an important pedagogical function when used correctly.	4.00	0.12	0.00	0.00	0.18	0.65
The amount of instructional time spent on preparing district students for assessment has increased over the course of my career.	3.50	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.18	0.78
Standardized assessment is a valid indicator of student learning if the data it generates is used appropriately.	3.25	0.06	0.18	0.12	0.29	0.35
The data that standardized assessment generates is being used appropriately by district decision makers.	3.64	0.06	0.12	0.18	0.53	0.12
Mandated assessment requires financial and material resources that could be better used in other aspects of educating district students.	3.43	0.00	0.12	0.12	0.29	0.47
Mandated assessment influences the directives that I give my staff.	3.33	0.06	0.06	0.06	0.12	0.71
Mandated assessments have negatively impacted district curriculum.	3.67	0.00	0.06	0.09	0.29	0.06
I am confident that the performance of district students on mandated assessments will be an accurate indicator of the instructional ability of district teachers.	2.67	0.12	0.35	0.35	0.18	0.00
District staff has been provided with adequate professional development to be able to use the data from assessment to inform my instruction.	3.23	0.00	0.29	0.18	0.47	0.06
The use of standardized assessment data in staff evaluation will accurately separate teachers based on their instructional effectiveness.	2.36	0.06	0.53	0.29	0.12	0.00
I am in agreement with the role that mandated assessment plays in the state's teacher evaluation framework as it pertains to the district's APPR agreement.	2.75	0.18	0.29	0.35	0.18	0.00
The emphasis given to mandated assessments has negatively affected the perspective of the teachers that I am directly responsible for.	3.33	0.00	0.06	0.41	0.12	0.41

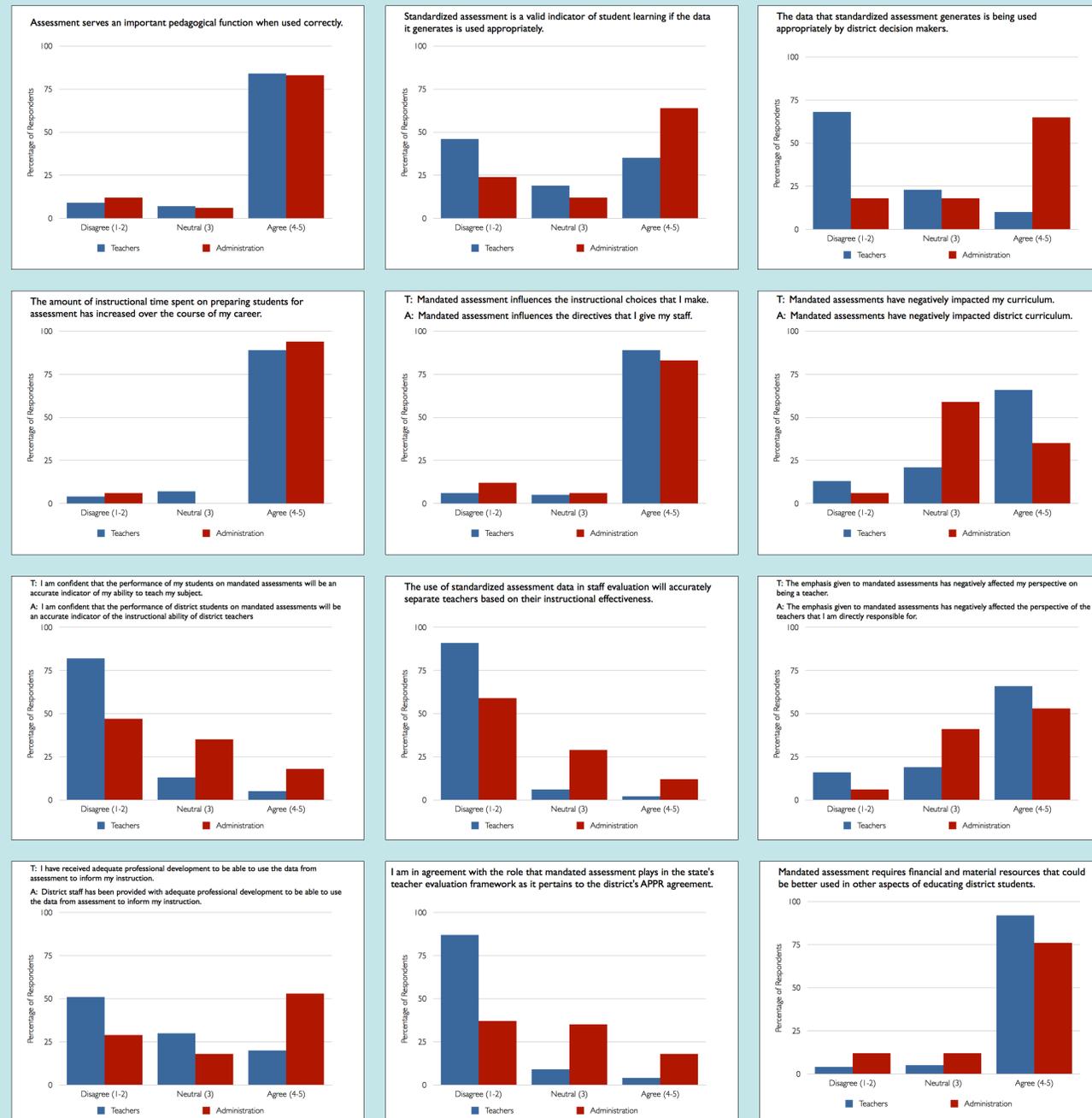
Anonymous Teacher Survey Comments:

"Teaching does not appear to be a humanitarian discipline anymore. It has become a sea of paperwork and technology fueled by a political machine."

"If I had known 17 years ago (when I first started) the direction that teaching was going to head in, I would not have become a teacher. If I didn't feel like it was too late, I would probably change careers now."

"As a 'seasoned' teacher (which we all are) I find that I am barely keeping my head above water. The administration can not seem to adapt a single program."

## Comparison of DPUFSD teacher and administrative staff on testing impact survey items:



## Discussion:

- The survey data suggests that the impact of testing on the learning process in DPUFSD is extensive, and largely negative. There is a largely uniform, and largely negative pattern of responses among teachers and administrators about the impacts of mandated assessments.
- DPUFSD staff members indicate that they are largely in agreement with the literature regarding the utility of assessments in the learning process, and the impact of high-stakes testing on the learning process.
- Respondents indicate that testing serves an important pedagogical role, but are less confident in the ability of tests to serve as a universally applicable indicator of student learning. Respondents also indicate that the amount of time spent on preparing students for assessment has increased over the course of their careers.
- Respondents indicate that increasing testing mandates are having a largely negative effect on their curriculum. Respondents indicate that testing mandates effect curricular choices, and that they have had a "negative" effect on the curriculum.
- Teachers indicate concerns about the ability of assessment data to indicate their instructional ability. A majority do not feel that mandated assessments will indicate their instructional effectiveness, or the effectiveness of their colleagues.
- Teachers indicate concerns about the role of test scores in the APPR agreement, and the appropriate usage of testing data by district decision makers.
- Two-thirds of teacher respondents indicate that the increased focus on mandated assessment has negatively effected their perspective on education.
- Respondents also indicate that testing results in the use of financial and material resources that could be better used in other aspects of educating district students.
- This pattern of responses suggests that, at least as far as the perception of DPUFSD staff is concerned, the movement to high-stakes testing in New York State, has not been accomplished with the broad support needed to provide teachers with curriculum that is not adversely affected by testing mandates.

## Conclusion:

- Administration should work to provide staff with professional development as relates to integrating testing data in the instructional process, and the relationship between sound pedagogy and assessment performance. By helping teachers to realize that good teaching will bring good test performance along for the ride, administration can help teachers feel less beset by testing mandates.
- This school year is the first year that the new APPR process is being implemented for the vast majority of the instructional staff in the state. Will the same amount of discomfort and low morale be seen after this first year is finished?
- Regardless of how high-stakes tests are perceived, how they impact our schools, or how we might feel about them, at the end of it all teachers will still be teaching students.

## Acknowledgements:

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