

Why People of Color Must Reject Market-Based Education Reforms: A Compilation of the Evidence

By

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Moving From the Bottom to the Top

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"Parents want real supports for their students, not just more punishing standards and tests. For a child who is academically drowning, moving the shoreline further away is no way to teach them how to swim. Rather, parents want a lifeline of supports that helps students learn, grow, and reach the shore"

Dr. John Jackson

What is a Market-based "Reform" Agenda?

Market-based education reform is corporate driven reform that includes policies that are motivated largely by the amount of monetary profit and political or economic control that can be gained by the individuals, organizations, and corporations whose "behind-the-scenes" efforts created the policies in the first place. It is grounded in two notions: public education should be run like a business, and public school students are "future workers" to be molded to fit their predetermined role in the corporate workforce. Moreover, on the "down-low," it is grounded in the idea that public schools are reservoirs of money that provide infinite financial opportunity for private profit.

The reformers have used two false narratives to push their reform measures. They sold the idea that public education is failing its children, particularly its "minority children." And, they convinced many that with the use of charter schools, vouchers, national standards, and high-stakes testing accountability; private corporations and government agencies can provide pathways for innovation and creativity to improve what is now considered failed public education. Research has shown otherwise. To date, market-based reform has negatively impacted public education in many ways. Driven by high-stakes standardized testing attached to untested national standards, such reform has undermined quality and equitable instruction for all students, drained schools and communities of much-needed funding, caused a proliferation of mismanagement, cheating, and stealing; and caused an effective disempowerment of collective bargaining along with the de-professionalization of teaching.

Educators and students of color suffer the major brunt of the negative impact market-based reform has on teaching and learning. Discriminatory state and federal education policies with an over emphasis on high-stakes testing foster achievement and economic gaps based on race and class. This ultimately impacts career acquisition and wealth accumulation for these subgroups in a very negative way. Communities must no longer embrace or tolerate these damaging policies; they must collectively demand better for children and educators as they engage in direct actions to express opposition to failing and divisive reform efforts. Opting children of color out of high-stakes standardized testing in pre-K-12 public education is a good place to start. Following is a compilation of compelling research and evidence on why people of color should be to "opt out" and demand an end to market-based reform. Empty test chair by empty test chair, policy makers and their corporate sponsors will get the message that enough is enough.

Reforms Cause More Harm Than Success for Non-White Students

Many question the efficacy of reforms that seem to be more problematic than beneficial. [Market-oriented Education Reforms' Rhetoric Trumps Reality](#) is a report from the Broader, Bolder Approach to Education that examines the assertion that these reforms have not been the panacea they were touted to be. The report takes a close look at three large urban school districts (Washington, D.C., New York City, and Chicago); because they had mayoral control, produced reliable district-level test score data from the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) (NAEP), and were led by proponents of market-based reform agenda.

Top-down pressure from federal education policies such as Race to the Top and No Child Left Behind, combined with organized advocacy efforts, is making a popular set of market-oriented education “reforms” look more like the new status quo than real reform. Reformers assert that test-based teacher evaluation, increased school “choice” through expanded access to charter schools, and the closure of “failing” and under enrolled schools will boost falling student achievement and narrow longstanding race- and income-based achievement gaps.

According to the results of the study the reforms deliver few benefits and in some cases harm the students they purport to help. Following are its findings:

- Test scores increased less, and achievement gaps grew more, in “reform” cities than in other urban districts.
- Reported successes for targeted students evaporated upon closer examination.
- Test-based accountability prompted churn that thinned the ranks of experienced teachers, but not necessarily bad teachers.
- School closures did not send students to better schools or save school districts money.
- Charter schools further disrupted the districts while providing mixed benefits, particularly for the highest-needs students.
- Emphasis on the widely touted market-oriented reforms drew attention and resources from initiatives with greater promise.
- The reforms missed a critical factor driving achievement gaps: the influence of poverty on academic performance.

Reforms Result in Separate and Unequal for Minority Students

The market-based reform “accountability” highly dependent on high-stakes test score reports has resulted in a detrimental trend of separate and unequal for non-white students. Instead of improved teaching and learning, re-segregation of schools and communities, loss of quality instruction, unfair marginalizing of non-white educators, community upheavals, and economic losses have been the consequence. Gary Orfield from [The Civil Rights Project at Harvard University](#) found that...“our schools remain largely segregated and are becoming more so. Segregated schools are still highly unequal. Segregation by race relates to segregation by poverty and to many forms of educational inequality for African American and Latino students; few whites experience impoverished schools. Efforts to overcome the effects of segregation through special programs have had some success, but there is no evidence that they have equalized systems of segregated schools.... Segregated schools, particularly those in big

cities, have stunningly high levels of high school dropouts and very poor records of preparing students for higher education. Segregation has not been a successful educational or social policy.” This trend of rapid re-segregation has been consistently stated by many other researchers in numerous reports.

Contributing to the inequity is an “accountability” grading process for school and district quality that many states implemented to facilitate improvement. At the forefront of the grading process are high-stakes test results. Now [recognized as faulty and illegitimate](#), grading systems have caused more harm than good. In a Miami Herald article titled [“Low-income schools struggle under state’s grading system,”](#) Michael Vasquez and David Smiley point out the collateral damage in Florida’s Miami-Dade and Broward Counties:

There is much at stake in the letter grade a school receives. Schools with A grades find it easier to attract new students, and teachers are rewarded with performance bonuses. Schools with F grades (or repeated Ds) end up in a fight for their very survival. If student test scores don’t improve, teachers and principals may be replaced, and ultimately the school could be closed... Of the 209 schools in Miami-Dade and Broward, with at least 90 percent of students receiving free or reduced lunch, 78 percent received a grade of C or worse. Roughly 39 percent of these high-poverty schools received a D or F.

The grading systems stigmatize schools, students, educators, and communities. And as stated before the unfortunate consequences are social and economic inequities that often include sub-par pedagogy, an inability to send children to schools close to home, a punitive withholding of funding for schools and teacher pay, loss of competitive property values, and an inability to attract businesses to communities. It is not difficult to see that the backlash is far-reaching. In his article, [“Public education: still separate and unequal,”](#) Journalist Bob Herbert states:

Schools are no longer legally segregated, but because of residential patterns, housing discrimination, economic disparities and long-held custom, they most emphatically are in reality...The current obsession with firing teachers, attacking unions and creating ever more charter schools has done very little to improve the academic outcomes of poor black and Latino students. Nothing has brought about gains on the scale that is needed.

He goes on to cite facts from a study conducted by the [Century Foundation](#) in Montgomery County, Md., that reveals what does make a difference. *Housing Policy Is School Policy: Economically Integrative Housing Promotes Academic Success in Montgomery County, Maryland* showed that

...low-income students who happened to be enrolled in affluent elementary schools did much better than similarly low-income students in higher-poverty schools in the county. The study found that "over a period of five to seven years, children in public housing who attended the school district's most advantaged schools (as measured by either subsidized lunch status or the district's own criteria) far outperformed in math and reading those children in public housing who attended the district's least-advantaged public schools.

Time and time again evidence shows “that it is not the race of the students that is significant, but rather the improved all-around environment of schools with better teachers, fewer classroom disruptions, pupils who are more engaged academically, parents who are more involved, and so on.” Time and time again evidence reveals that zip codes tell all as reported in the [NEA Today article “What’s her number?”](#) : “When it comes to location, a Zip code – a mere five digits- can frequently describe the quality of the education that public school students receive and sometimes even the direction their lives will take. The article looks at five geographical areas to reveal how “students in poorer of Texas received only two-thirds of the state funding that was received by students living in wealthier districts,” and how there exist a “financial gulf between working-class, minority districts like Edgewood and predominately white, affluent ones such as Alamo Heights Independent School District just five miles away.”

Such inequities are the norm for non-Whites, and it is clear that market-based reform with its false notion of “accountability” highly dependent on high-stakes test scores perpetuates and widens the gulf of separate and unequal as opposed to closing it.

Reforms Result in Poor Teacher Quality for Non-White Student Schools

There can be little doubt that parents, students, and citizens care about the expertise and professionalism of the people who work with the nation’s children each day. Thus, teacher quality is an important factor in successful teaching and learning. It is equally important for schools to be staffed with educators and role models who have diverse backgrounds and who may share cultural and linguistic similarities with the students and communities they serve. Moreover, it is important for these teachers to have varied and good evaluation tools to ensure that teachers and schools are meeting the needs of their learners. Unfortunately, high-stakes testing has become the preferred method by which reformers, politicians, and school districts attempt to gauge the quality of public school teacher and the schools in which they teach. Consequently, non-White educators who are straddled with Value Added Measure (VAM) scores that deem them ineffective as educators are facing job loss. Not only has VAM been proven to be an ineffective barometer of teacher quality, its use has resulted in a trend to move non-White teachers out of schools. Additionally, it serves as a deterrent for non-Whites to pursue careers in education. It is not a stretch to say that the use of this erroneous assessment tool undervalues the diversity that is necessary for teaching a diverse student population, and has created some detrimental problems for schools and communities of color. Troublesome too is the fact that schools face unwarranted closings based on test score results.

The use of high stakes testing to gauge school and teacher effectiveness has shown negative impact in Chicago where there has been a disproportionate firing and displacement of experienced, veteran, African American teachers. As the Chicago Teachers Union pointed out in a report titled [The Schools Chicago’s Students Deserve](#): “In 2011, African Americans represented 65% of teachers in schools tapped for closure and 40% of tenured teachers laid off. The percentage of less experienced White teachers hired has steadily increased” from 48% to 62%. A fact that is even more alarming is that African Americans made up 30% of the tenured workforce in Chicago, yet they made up 40% of those who were laid off. This type of targeted discrimination is not unique to Chicago, though. Communities

from Atlanta, Boston, Detroit, Newark, New York City, Philadelphia, Washington D.C., and Wichita have filed similar complaints with the Department of Education's Office of Civil Rights as reported in an article by Rosalyn Rossi titled "[Parents and students from other cities join Chicagoans in claiming school 'reforms' violate minority students' rights.](#)" Test scores are predominantly used to determine which teachers get laid off or fired and which schools get sanctioned, closed, turned-around, and converted to private-managed charters. The schools that are being sanctioned are predominantly high non-White populations and/or low income. And nationally, according to Richard Ingersoll and Harold May in their report titled [Recruitment, Retention and the Minority teacher Shortage](#), "minority teachers are overwhelmingly employed in public schools serving high-poverty, high-minority, and urban communities." This all suggests one very grave problem: the test scores from children of color are being used to justify the elimination of the vital cultural and linguistic supports that are provided by teachers of color.

Another alarming fact is schools that are placed under sanction have a large number of teachers who are not qualified or certified to teach in the areas in which they are placed. Forced staff turn-overs, the tendency for quality teachers to avoid sanctioned schools, and the increased use of recent college graduates with no training results in teaching quality that is sub-par. In a paper published in *Sociology of Education*, Stanford University, a team of three researchers presented the results of an analysis of teacher assignments in the nation's fourth-largest school district, Miami-Dade County Public Schools. Their report titled [Systematic Sorting: Teacher Characteristics and Class Assignments](#) identifies trends that seem to contribute to teacher turnover and achievement gaps nationwide. The report concludes that the relationship between teacher experience and the average prior achievement of teachers' students could have two negative implications:

- It could increase turnover among new teachers. Prior research suggests that new teachers are more likely to leave their school when assigned more students who are low-achieving and who create disciplinary problems than their colleagues (q. Donaldson and Johnson 2010; Feng 2010). The same is not true for more experienced teachers, who tend to leave at relatively low rates, regardless of class assignments.
- It could exacerbate within-school achievement gaps. Within schools, minority and poor students are assigned less experienced teachers since they tend to be lower achieving on average. Although student learning gains do not necessarily increase linearly with teacher experience, novice teachers are consistently less effective at raising student achievement compared with their more experienced peers.

School policy makers and administrators ignore this as they choose to employ inexperienced [Teach for America](#) graduates at non-White schools. Teach for America (TFA) is a program that was started by Princeton University alumnae Wendy Kopp. Its original intent was to place the best and the brightest college graduates in urban and rural schools to make-up for the short fall of qualified educators. It has morphed into a program, heavily funded by market-based reformers and the federal government, which often replaces qualified, certified and experienced educators with recent TFA college graduates. Professional educators spend a couple of years learning educational methods and acquiring teaching experience through their course work, internships, and volunteer hours. In contrast, TFA graduates

enter classrooms with only five to six weeks of crash course preparation. They are placed in schools that are majority populated with students of color and in districts with schools that are deemed “low performing” due to low standardized test scores and low graduation rates. In an article titled “[A Challenge to Teach For America's Corporate Orientation, From Those on the Inside](#),” J. Cersonsky reports

The TFA orbit is also growing. It now has more than 10,000 corps members in 48 regions, as well as more than 32,000 alumni. Districts pay thousands in fees to TFA for each corps member in addition to their salaries—at the expense of the existing teacher workforce. Chicago, for example, is closing 48 schools and laying off 850 teachers and staff while welcoming 350 corps members. After Hurricane Katrina, New Orleans cut 7,500 school staff, converted the majority of its schools to charters, and, between 2005 and 2010, saw its share of black teachers drop from 73 percent to 56 percent. Over the past five years, TFA expanded its Greater New Orleans corps from 85 teachers to 375.

Is this good for the students who most many agree need the best and most experienced educators? A study done titled [Teach for America: A review of the Evidence](#) reveals the following:

- Students of novice TFA teachers perform significantly less well in reading and mathematics than those of credentialed beginning teachers.
- More than 50% of TFA teachers leave after two years, and more than 80% leave after three years
- From a school-wide perspective, the high turnover of TFA teachers is costly. Recruiting and training replacements for teachers who leave involves financial costs, and the higher achievement gains associated with experienced teachers and lower turnover may be lost as well.

According to former [Teach for American Corp Beth Sondel](#), 2004 TFA alum who is now a PhD student in the Department of Curriculum and Instruction at the University of Wisconsin, this program facilitates inequity:

The reform movement that Teach for America is currently involved in, corporate financiers of the organization, support and implementation of charter reform, and their promotion of the deregulation of teacher education—these are not the things that are working towards truly just education.

Sondel could not be more correct in her assertion. TFA corps, non-certified educators, and inexperienced educators are not the answer needed to provide non-white students with the creative and experienced pedagogy that will produce college bound, work bound, and family bound students that are armed with the intellectual and social skills needed for success. Eliminating the practice of staffing schools with inferior and inexperienced staff along with judging educator quality by high-stakes test scores will go far in providing communities with what is really needed to foster success.

Reforms Result in Sub-par Pedagogy for Non-White Students

Many schools that are predominately Black and Brown are placed under sanction for low test scores for math and reading. Federal and state policies require this as a “remediation” effort to help schools meet proficiency requirements for math and reading. Herbert Khol, in his article titled [“The Educational Panopticon”](#) said this in regards to the remediation efforts:

The French philosopher Michel Foucault extended the use of "panopticon" to characterize social institutions such as prisons, hospitals, mental asylums, and schools which institutionalize constant surveillance and exert mind control, often without the knowledge or awareness of the people being controlled. When I talk about an educational panopticon I mean a system in which teachers and students are under constant scrutiny, allowed no choice over what is learned or taught, evaluated continuously, and punished for what is considered inadequate performance. In this context students and teachers are forced to live in a constant state of anxiety, self-doubt, wariness, anomie, and even suppressed rage...People who make and administer high stakes tests know the moral and personal costs of subjecting all students to them. People who insult and denigrate teachers by forcing scripted curriculum on them are perfectly aware that they are forcing teachers to act against their conscience and students to close down their minds. What must be raised and answered for is the moral cost of creating joyless schools that resemble panopticons.

His description is apt in what is going on in many of the schools placed under “sanction.” Elective courses are replaced with test prep classes, and meaningful, project-based learning is far too often prohibited. If honors, gifted, and Advanced Placement courses are offered at all in sanctioned schools, two-thirds or more of the students are labeled “low-performing” and will never benefit from such course offerings. Additionally, “bubble students” – those close to achieving proficient test scores - are often taken out of their non-testing classes to sit for test prep sessions. Furthermore, in some cases, the emphasis on test scores has coerced schools and districts to discriminate against those students who are predicted to score low on the test, chronic truants, English language learners, and those with learning disabilities, for instance. As [Nichols and Berliner](#) pointed out, there has been a tendency to “get rid of these students of label them in some way so as not to take the tests and bring down the average.” Equally troubling, social studies instructors are forced to take class time for reading test prep in lieu of vital history, civic, geography, government and economic lessons. Generally, the instructors in sanctioned are novice, frequently not certified in the area in which they are teaching, and often come from the ranks of Teach for America, which is according to the former Director for Opportunity to Learn, [Tina Dove](#), in a comment made during the 2011 Save Our Schools Conference held at America University in Washington, D.C, “tantamount to the Tuskegee Experiment.”

In contrast to many students of color, most of their white counter-parts never see a Teach for America teacher. Nor are their schools constantly hindered by transient staffs. Additionally, the egregious test prepping does not permeate the entire fabric of most of their school communities. Nor are they constantly labeled as failing or below average. This sad scenario plays throughout America in school districts with predominately Black and Brown populations. It results in a very ineffective and racist practice that results in a huge difference between the quality of teaching and learning that occurs

in schools populated with students of color and that which occurs in those that are populated with White students.

Reforms Result in Questionable Ethics in Test Distribution and Grading

Often people question the legitimacy of high-stakes test results because educators, parents, and students are unable to see their actual graded tests. They receive only score reports that reflect the results of computerized grading or assessors working for private corporations who are trained to read large numbers of written responses. In an [op-ed piece published in the Miami Herald](#), United States Representative Fredericka Wilson, representing the 24th District of Florida and formerly an elected official in the Florida Senate, has continually expressed concern over what she feels is inequity in high-stakes testing:

When I served in the Florida Senate I demanded to see every version of the FCAT administered to third graders that year. There were 30. I spent an entire day ranking them in the order of their difficulty, and by dinner I had examined tests that ranged from one a first grader could pass all the way to one I don't think a high school freshman could pass. I immediately demanded to know who decides which schools get which test. Nobody on the premises knew, and to this day I have never received an answer... After years of complaining and pointing out missteps, and at times borderline criminal activity, I have reached the conclusion that the FCAT continues because it is a cash cow for adults who care absolutely nothing about our children.

For many, standardized test cheating scandals also help to foster a lack of trust. Cheating allegations in two major districts gained national attention in 2013. The Atlanta Public Schools alleged instances of cheating under the leadership of Dr. Beverly Hall and the testing and scoring irregularities and possible cheating under the leadership of former Chancellor of Education for Washington D.C. Public Schools Michelle Rhee raised concerns about ethic violations and illegalities. Both instances drew national attention to the fact that high-stakes testing can and often does result in cheating. As [Nichols and Berliner](#) explained, this type of social phenomena has been well-defined by Campbell's Law and is, therefore, not surprising:

...the more any quantitative social indicator [like high-stakes tests] is used for social decision-making, the more subject it will be to corruption pressures and the more apt it will be to distort and corrupt the social processes it was intended to monitor.

In his blog post titled ["Failing the Test Why cheating scandals and parent rebellions are erupting in schools in New York, Washington, D.C., and Atlanta,"](#) David Kirp focuses on this lack of confidence in the system.

It's a terrible time for advocates of market-driven reform in public education...Former Atlanta superintendent Beverly Hall, feted for boosting her students' test scores at all costs, has been indicted in a massive cheating scandal. Michelle Rhee, the former Washington D.C. school chief who is the darling of the accountability crowd, faces accusations, based on a memo released by veteran PBS correspondent John Merrow, that she knew about, and did nothing

to stop, widespread cheating. In a Washington Post op-ed, Bill Gates, who has spent hundreds of millions of dollars promoting high-stakes, test-driven teacher evaluation, did an about-face and urged a kinder, gentler approach that teachers could embrace. And parents in New York State staged a rebellion, telling their kids not to take a new and untested achievement exam.

[The resignation of Tony Bennett](#) as Florida's education commissioner, July 2013, reveals malfeasance on another level. Bennett's former elected position as Indiana's superintendent of Indiana public schools met with clear rejection as the Indiana voters elected an official that was not firmly rooted in market-based reform. Prior to his failure to win a re-election, he engaged in suspect behavior in Indiana that ultimately led to his resignation as Florida's education commissioner. Bennett made changes to the school grading formula in Indiana after learning that a high-profile charter school would be awarded a "C" grade. This allowed that school to remain open. In contrast to this, however, two predominantly Black schools were closed down that experienced the same test score results of the private managed charter. They clearly did not garner the same hands-on care that was given to the charter school. Revelation of these facts resulted in Bennett's resignation.

In his article titled ["From School Grades to Common Core: Debunking the Accountability Scam,"](#) Anthony Cody presents a compelling argument that cheating and manipulation is the rule and not the exception in market-based reform. He supports his argument with strong evidence using the "accountability" data:

...the poorest schools (in Indiana), a little over half of are assigned an F or D, compared with about 22 percent across all schools...a huge chunk of schools, most of which serve advantaged student populations, literally face no risk of getting an F, while almost one in five schools, virtually every one of which with a relatively high poverty rate, has no shot at an A grade...97 percent of Florida's lowest-poverty schools receive A or B grades, and virtually every one of the schools receiving a D or F have poverty rates above the median. It's because schools are judged largely by absolute performance, and students from higher-income families tend to score higher on tests.

And the conclusion he draws is difficult to refute:

Standardized tests are a political weapon and can be used to tell whatever story you want. The campaign to hold schools and teachers "accountable" for test scores is a political project designed to deflect responsibility away from people who have gotten obscenely wealthy over the past few decades... The whole push to raise standards is a political project, and those in charge of the levers of control - the cut scores and school grading systems -- are determined to use the tests, especially the new and terrible results from the Common Core tests, to stigmatize and label as failures schools attended by poor and minority students.

Cheating and unethical behavior has become a major concern as more and more districts and district officials seem to be engaging in cheating to comply with the accountability measures that form the basis of market-based reform. And cheating in the form of data manipulation by school officials in

leadership positions to foster the continuation of monetary profit and job security and targeting populations to create a failing culture is just as disconcerting as changing test responses. It is doubtful that these unethical practices will go away as long as there is an emphasis on high-stakes testing and financial gain. In fact, the stakes will only continue to increase with the more involved assessments that are to accompany the national Common Core State Standards adopted by the majority of states.

Reforms Violate Students' Rights and Cause Physical and Emotional Harm

Students are constantly bombarded with the reality of market-based reform as they sit in public schools across the nation. Many are faced with the loss of vital social support services as their community schools are shut down and no longer in service. These children and their parents often deal with long commutes just to get to school. Additionally, some families face charter schools that will not accept all their children, meaning that one family may have to enroll each of their children in different schools. There are also rising instances where children with special needs, English language learners and student with disabilities, are turned away from charter schools altogether. Other families must content with the instability of charter schools that may be "here today and gone tomorrow."

Once in school, much of the school day for Black and Brown students is spent preparing for standardized tests or taking standardized tests. Many children wrangle with curricula that negate critical, creative, and cooperative education or curricula that is developmentally inappropriate. Music, art, recess, and physical education are sublimated and sometimes non-existent. Moreover, the students are taught by teachers that are now evaluated on how well the students perform on standardized tests. This creates another angst that is often communicated by the teacher to the children. Couple pressure with the inability to explore or expend physical energy, and the result is a type of anxiety in the classroom that interferes with sound teaching and learning. Often the pressure is too great for many children, and often it manifests in emotional and physical illness. [Dr. Marilyn Benoit](#) of Howard University, former President of the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry states,

I am seeing more families where schoolwork that is developmentally inappropriate for the cognitive levels of children is causing emotional havoc at home. The pressure on teachers to teach to tests and outperform their colleagues is translating into stressful evenings for parents and children.

In a post titled "[A tough critique of Common Core on early childhood education,](#)" Valerie Strauss shares the concerns of early childhood educators who were left out of the discussion on Common Core Standards and assessments for children in grades pre-K -12:

We have grave concerns about the core standards for young children.... The proposed standards conflict with compelling new research in cognitive science, neuroscience, child development, and early childhood education about how young children learn, what they need to learn, and how best to teach them in kindergarten and the early grades....

They share four areas of concern:

- The K-3 standards will lead to long hours of direct instruction in literacy and math. This kind of “drill and grill” teaching has already pushed active, play-based learning out of many kindergartens.
- The standards will intensify the push for more standardized testing, which is highly unreliable for children under age eight.
- Didactic instruction and testing will crowd out other crucial areas of young children’s learning: active, hands-on exploration, and developing social, emotional, problem-solving, and self-regulation skills—all of which are difficult to standardize or measure but are the essential building blocks for academic and social accomplishment and responsible citizenship.
- There is little evidence that standards for young children lead to later success. The research is inconclusive; many countries with top-performing high-school students provide rich play-based, nonacademic experiences—not standardized instruction—until age six or seven.

[In another post by Strauss, August 2013](#), New York’s 2013 High School Principal of the Year Carol Burris shares her concerns that the tougher, more difficult Common Core State Standards and PARCC assessments that were piloted in New York will mislabel proficient students:

...young students in New York State who are developing as they should will be placed in remedial services, forgoing enrichment in the arts because they are a “2” and thus below the new proficiency level. That is where the vast majority of students fall on the new scales — below proficiency and off the “road to college readiness.” Students, who in reality may not need support, will be sorted into special education or “response to intervention” services. Parents will worry for their children’s future. The newspapers will bash the public schools and their teachers at a time when morale is already at an extreme low.

In her research study titled [“Negative Impacts of High-stakes Testing,”](#) Michaela Minarechová stated:

The students suffer in various psychological and physical ways, for example, anxiety, stress, exhaustion resulting from lack of food and water, an increase in blood pressure and the rate of respiration, elevated body temperature, gastrointestinal problems, headaches, difficulty sleeping, and muscle spasms (qtd. Blazer, 2011). If a child constantly works under pressure, we cannot expect there to be no impact on their psychological or emotional well-being. Stress in children manifests itself in a variety of behavior issues such as frequent, unjustified and unpredictable “explosions” or problematic behavior at school or at home. Other possible symptoms of stress are jumpiness, nervousness and poor concentration, which can affect the student’s performance in school. The symptoms of stress also include a lack of appetite and the student being frequently ill.

According to a study titled [The Crisis in Early Childhood Education](#) by Joan Almon and Edward Miller, the over-emphasis on direct instruction used to prepare students for high-stakes standardized testing for children 4 to 7 years old causes problems in overall development that has lasting effects into

adulthood. The report draws on a study conducted over twenty-four years that revealed the direct instruction students showed serious problems in overall development:

- 47% of the DI students had needed special education, compared to only 6% of the other students;
- 34% had been arrested for a felony offense, compared with 9% of the others;
- 27% had been suspended from work, while none of the others had been;
- None of the DI students had married and were living with spouses, compared with 31% of the others.
- Only 11% of the DI students had ever done volunteer work, compared to about 43% of the others.

“The results are clear: When at-risk children get inappropriate early education it has a lasting negative effect.”

The over-emphasis on high-stakes testing has and will continue to harm children, particularly our most vulnerable populations: special needs, second language, high-poverty, and students of color. According to the [National Center for Education Statistics](#), “children who are poor and Black are the most likely to be denied recess. First-graders in high poverty schools are 5 times as likely to have no recess at all as those in wealthier communities, and first-graders in high non-White schools are 7 times as likely to have no recess as children in mostly White schools.” Those that reap financial rewards from market-based reforms do not consider the facts. Consequently, it is the responsibility of the care-givers to resist and push for pedagogy that is non-threatening and serves to enrich as opposed to causing long-term harm.

Reforms Facilitate the School to Prison Pipeline

High-stakes test scores do not indicate that students have learned deeply, claimed ownership to knowledge and learning, obtained the ability to work with others, or developed the ability to think creatively. Nor do they really reflect the quality of a school or a teacher. They suggest trends in regards to cultural practices, social class, and the ability to learn test taking strategies. And to a certain extent they reveal aptitude based on assimilation and cultural bias. On the most fundamental level, though, high-stakes testing increases stress levels in schools. As a student’s promotion to the next grade level rests upon test scores, so does school funding, schools closings, and the job security and salaries of teachers and administrators. That is an enormous amount of pressure to place upon one child and one test. The stress factor is further agitated by the fact that many states use exit exams to determine who graduates with a high school diploma or fails to graduate and receives, instead, a certificate of completion, of which has little to no worth.

Fair Test, an advocacy group that works for equality through fair and open testing, stated in [“How Testing Feeds the School to Prison Pipeline”](#) that “the test-prep culture pits teachers against kids, damages school climate and reduces students’ engagement with school. This in turn fosters problem behaviors, which are then countered with zero tolerance. Zero tolerance and high-stakes testing reinforce each other, creating a downward spiral.” As these policies have persisted, schools expulsions have also increased, particularly for students of color: “For example, between 2002-03 and 2006-07, expulsions decreased by 2% for White students, but increased 33% for Blacks and 6% for Latinos... Vastly disproportionate numbers of low-income, racial minority, [students with disabilities] and English language learners fail state exit tests and do not obtain diplomas.”

Suzi Parker in an article titled [“High School Exit Exams Fuel the School-to-Prison Pipeline”](#) states that

A new study, [The Effect of High School Exit Exams on Graduation, Employment, Wages and Incarceration](#) sheds startling light on a strong connection between high school exit exams and rates of incarceration. The authors of the study, Olesya Baker and Kevin Lang, compared states with exit exams to those that did not, and found that roughly one percent of students failed their exit exams and were denied diplomas as a result. This population of young people had a 12.5% increase in their rate of incarceration. The study found no particular benefits, in terms of employment or wages, from the exit exams.

According to Education Week blogger Anthony Cody in a blog titled [“Exit Exams Boost the School to Prison Pipeline”](#),

High stakes test have been heavily promoted over the past decade or so, supposedly to insure employers of the value of a high school diploma. About half the states in the nation now have an exit exam as a precondition for a diploma, and billions are spent annually on the tests, and preparation for them... One of the hallmarks of test-driven accountability is the penchant for ranking students, identifying some as academic winners, and others losers. The highest stake manifestation of this is the high school exit exam... Other aspects of the school reform policy agenda also contribute to the school to prison pipeline. Schools under intense pressure to show test score growth are more likely to put in place zero tolerance discipline policies, which result in higher suspension and dropout rates. Students who act out are increasingly being given psychiatric diagnoses, as early as kindergarten. The expectation that all students reach the same set of academic goals at the same time creates a rigid structure that makes students who are not "on schedule," or not capable of sitting and receiving information for long periods of time "abnormal"... The Gates Foundation has been a major force in advocating for standardization and the increased stakes attached to test scores. It was interesting to learn that the Gates Foundation last month bought a 3.2% share in the global security firm G4S, worth \$172 million. This company operates for-profit prisons and cash handling services around the world, including several prisons in Israel and its occupied territories.

The stresses of high-stakes testing and exit exams, and the accompanying zero-tolerance policies, have drastically altered the environment of our public schools. The current policies are written

so that schools must receive high test scores in order to maintain their funding, and because of this emphasis, the test score becomes more important than the student. Thus, these practices have come to break the hope and morale of many children. Some students get pushed out of school, some get punished for not conforming to standardized learning expectations, and many others are denied a high school diploma. In the end, though, all of the side-effects from the testing culture have disproportionately affected students of color.

Reforms Facilitate the Redistribution of Wealth

Education reform advocates in front of the public continually say they are "putting children first." Behind closed doors, the conversation changes. According to investment banker [Michael Moe](#),

Rapid changes in education could unlock "immense potential for entrepreneurs... there's not a bigger problem or bigger opportunity in my estimation."

Moe, a veteran of Lehman Brothers and Merrill Lynch, is on the forefront of exploiting public education dollars for Wall Street profits. He leads an investment group that finds money for companies that want a share of the \$1 trillion in taxpayer money allocated for public education, and according to Moe "Investors are going to have to support candidates and push back against the push back."

[The American Legislative Exchange Council](#), the architects of the horrendous Stand Your Ground Laws and of the policies that support market based reform (public private charters, vouchers, union busting, over emphasis on punitive high stakes testing, and teacher evaluations based on student assessments), partners businessmen with politicians to create a symbiotic relationship that results in compromised public education and a weakened teaching profession while ensuring profit for corporate entities. ALEC-associated corporations spend millions of dollars funding education reform initiatives and lobbying to push through education policies that are harmful to all children and destructive to all communities. They are most harmful to students of color and most destructive to urban communities. ALEC continually uses false propaganda to further their agenda by producing reports on K – 12 public education. The National Education Policy Center examined the academic integrity of ALEC's 18th edition of the American Legislative Exchange Council's (ALEC) Report Card on American in a research study titled [ALEC v. Kids](#) and concluded:

The authors' claims of "a growing body of research" lack citations; their grading system contradicts the testing data that they report; and their data on alternative teacher research is simply wrong. Overall, ALEC's Report Card is grounded less in research than in ideological tenets, as reflected in the high grades it assigns to states with unproven and even disproven market-based policies. The report's purpose appears to be more about shifting control of education to private interests than in improving education.

Sadly, tax dollars allocated for public education are being exploited for profit at the expense of all children and not just by ALEC and its corporate and political fat cats. Even the World Bank is in on the take. Blog site [Education Alchemy](#) states that

Lead Education Specialist” Luis Crouch helps manage the billion-dollar Global Partnership for Education, run out of the bank’s headquarters. Crouch is a revolving door within a revolving door—over the past ten years he has shuttled back and forth between the bank and Research Triangle Institute, a nonprofit that sells education tests to the bank and USAID, according to a USAID consultant familiar with the deals who says Crouch consistently favors RTI. Asked about his apparent conflicts of interest, Crouch declines to comment, while bank spokesmen also decline...Who else supports the Global Partnership for Education? Well for starters, private sector corporations and private foundations are the newest members represented on the Global Partnership Board of Directors. Current Board members from the private sector include representatives from Microsoft Corporation and Intel Corporation. Additionally, Microsoft and Pearson will provide a combined \$30 million between 2012 and 2015 to increase school access, improve teacher development, school innovation and effective use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) in Global Partnership developing country partners.

A report by [Pauline Lipman](#) summarizes all of this quite nicely:

Under the Global Agreement on Trade in Services, all aspects of education and education services are subject to global trade. The result is the global marketing of schooling from primary school through higher education. Schools, education management organizations, tutoring services, teacher training, tests, curricula online classes, and franchises of branded universities are now part of a global education market. Education markets are one facet of the neoliberal strategy to manage the structural crisis of capitalism by opening the public sector to capital accumulation. The roughly \$2.5 trillion global market in education is a rich new arena for capital investment. This policy agenda has been aggressively pushed by transnational organizations such as the World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development. Objectives and performance targets are the order of the day, and testing is a prominent mechanism to steer curriculum and instruction to meet these goals efficiently and effectively.

Ryan McCarthy in an article titled [“White Families Now \\$95K Richer than African-American Families on Average, According To New Study”](#) (year) pointed out how public policy and discrimination have fostered a tremendous wealth gap between African- Americans and Whites. In the article he states

The racial wealth gap results from historical and contemporary factors but the disturbing fourfold increase in such a short time reflects public policies, such as tax cuts on investment income and inheritance, which benefit the wealthiest and redistribute wealth and opportunities... At the same time, evidence from multiple sources demonstrates the powerful role of persistent discrimination in housing, credit, and labor markets.

Ryan is correct in identifying public policy and discrimination as factors, but he fails to include the negative impact of pre-K -12 public school education policies that is beginning to and will cause an even more pronounced divide. No Child Left Behind, subsequent state laws, and now Obama’s Race to the Top policy all use high-stakes standardized tests to quantify and qualify academic success. This, too, has

and will continue to contribute to an inability to increase wealth and income, as many African-Americans who fail high school exit exams are excluded from higher education and the career and income opportunities afforded by earning college degrees. High-stakes testing has contributed to these startling facts in a disconcerting way. In his Time Magazine article [“Dropout Nation,”](#) Nathan Thornburgh stated

In today's data-happy era of accountability, testing and No Child Left Behind, here is the most astonishing statistic in the whole field of education: an increasing number of researchers are saying that nearly 1 out of 3 public high school students won't graduate... For Latinos and African Americans, the rate approaches an alarming 50%.

The over-emphasis on the state mandated assessments has contributed to the high drop-out rate of African American students, particularly African- American males. Another report, [“The Effects of High Stakes Testing on Student Motivation and Learning,”](#) has documented this phenomenon too:

High-stakes tests often decrease student motivation and lead to higher student retention and dropout rates...Some researchers found that dropout rates were 4 to 6 percent higher in schools with high school graduation exams. Another study reported that students in the bottom quintile in states with high-stakes tests were 25 percent more likely to drop out of high school than were their peers in states without high-stakes tests ...88 percent of the states with high school graduation tests have higher dropout rates than do states without graduation tests. In 62 percent of these states, dropout rates increased in comparison with the rest of the nation after the state implemented high-stakes graduation exams.

Conclusion

Dr. John H. Jackson, president of the Schott Foundation for Education, in his article titled [“Moving from Standards to Supports”](#) stated

Federal and state education policies have focused primarily on efforts to raise standards, improve assessments, and evaluate teachers. While each of these issues warrants attention in the landscape of education policy, they are not effective drivers toward significantly changing the conditions for students across the country...Having high standards is important, but they are not "game changers" or systemic policy solutions. In fact, [data confirm](#) that overreliance on testing and standards as the driving basis for reform has created a climate in which teachers' ability to exercise their craft and implement student-centered learning methods has been drastically curtailed. The standards-based reform agenda has made it virtually impossible for educators to give all students the varied attention and resources needed to engage them in a meaningful learning process... Our policymakers, starting with President Obama, must lead with a supports-based reform agenda focused on creating the learning environments and conditions in which all children will have an opportunity to learn and succeed.

Care givers of students of color must start asking the hard question: **Why have policies that were supposed to narrow the achievement gap resulted in compromising quality and equity in public**

education while a select few seem to be reaping financial rewards? They must begin to take action against a system that serves to ill-prepare their children for academic success, career preparation, and the ultimate ability to accumulate and build wealth. Of high importance, they must not fall prey to the trap of “school choice,” which in itself is a method of racist exclusion that provides for a “few” at the expense of the “many.” Instead, they must first and foremost, stop allowing their children to be used to further the inequities in public education and ultimate wealth building. Because standardized testing is undermining quality instruction for students of color, which ultimately impacts career acquisition and wealth accumulation, opting their children out of standardized testing in pre K-12 public education has to be the start on the quest for education quality and equity for all of America’s public school students.

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