



## **Research Brief**

### **Sanctions, School Improvement, and Student Achievement**

**Question:** Does the threat of sanctions contribute positively to school improvement and to increased student achievement?

**Summary of Findings:** No Child Left Behind as well as many state policies maintain that the threat of sanctions are a method that will insure quality teaching and improved student achievement. Proponents of these policies often point to states such as Florida and Texas and their improved achievement scores under such policies. For the most part, these claims are not supported by research. One study did suggest that sanctions linked to a comprehensive education reform initiative more powerfully impacted teaching improvement, principal understanding, and resource allocation to support student achievement goals. Most of the research, however, points not only to more harm than good from high-stakes testing, but that improved scores may be statistical inaccuracies or invalid measures of learning.

#### **Major Findings and Conclusions:**

Policies that focus on high-stakes testing have the following effects and unintended consequences:

- corrupting educational reform
- undermining achievement
- teachers tend to become so controlling in their teaching style that the quality of students' performance actually declines
- the assessments were largely perceived as unfair, invalid, and unrealistic
- increased drop-out rates
- teachers' and schools' cheating on exams
- teachers' defection from the profession
- administrators responded with control strategies that rigidified organizations, forestalling dialog and learning processes
- Instructional reform developed only feebly
- strong effects may be largely due to sample selection, regression to the mean, and problems related to the aggregation of test score results
- state tests and test scores did not correlate to other established measures of learning
- some states lowered standards between pre and post testing.

#### **Online Resources:**

##### **High-Stakes Testing, Uncertainty, and Student Learning**

A brief history of high-stakes testing is followed by an analysis of eighteen states with severe consequences attached to their testing programs. These 18 states were examined to see if their high-stakes testing programs were affecting student learning, the intended outcome of high-stakes testing policies promoted throughout the nation. Scores on the individual tests that states use were not analyzed for evidence of learning. Such



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scores are easily manipulated through test-preparation programs, narrow curricula focus, exclusion of certain students, and so forth.

Citation: Amrein, A.L. & Berliner, D.C. (2002, March 28). High-stakes testing, uncertainty, and student learning *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 10 (18). Retrieved July 24, 2003 from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n18/>

Kentucky's Conflicting Reform Principles: High-Stakes School Accountability and Student Performance Assessment

Designed to monitor school accountability, KIRIS (Kentucky Instructional Results Information System) offers a powerful lesson about how high-stakes accountability systems can distort and undermine original visions for effective curriculum, instruction, and assessment practices

(Jones, Ken ; Whitford, Betty Lou; Phi Delta Kappan v79 n4 p276-81 Dec 1997)

<http://static.highbeam.com/p/phideltakappan/december011997/>

State Performance-based Accountability Systems: A National Perspective.

Comparative analysis of state performance-based accountability systems (PABS), which consist of five components: standards, assessments, multiple indicators, rewards, and sanctions. Discusses three unintended consequences of PABS: narrowing of curriculum, teaching to the test, and timeliness of available data.

(Mathers, Judith K. School Business Affairs v67 n9 p6-8,10-12 Sep 2001)

<http://asbointl.org/WhatsNew/SchoolBusinessAffairs/index.asp?bid=556>

Rescuing Our Schools from "Tougher Standards" – Alfie Kohn

It has taken some educators and parents a while to realize that the rhetoric of "standards" is turning schools into giant test-prep centers, effectively closing off intellectual inquiry and undermining enthusiasm for learning (and teaching).

<http://www.alfiekohn.org/standards/standards.htm>

A Dozen Essays About Standards and Testing – Alfie Kohn

<http://www.alfiekohn.org/standards/testarticles.htm>

Raising Standards or Raising Barriers? Inequality and High-Stakes Testing in Public Education

Most of the contributors to the volume have found evidence that policies that focus on high-stakes testing corrupt educational reform and undermine achievement, especially for at-risk students.

Edited by Gary Orfield and Mindy L. Kornhaber. Century Foundation Press, Copyright © 2001 ISBN 0-87078-452-8

<http://www.civilrightsproject.harvard.edu/research/books/raising.php>

Payment for Results: Effects of the Kentucky and Maryland Group-based Performance Award Programs. Examined similarities and differences in teacher and principal perceptions of the effects of two state-level rewards and *sanctions* programs. Interviews with teachers, principals, and other administrators, and surveys



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of principals, indicated that overall, salary bonuses with sanctions linked to a comprehensive education reform initiative more powerfully impacted teaching improvement, principal understanding, and resource allocation to support student achievement goals.

Kelley, Carolyn; Kimball, Steve ; Conley, Sharon; Peabody Journal of Education v75 n4 p159-199 2000  
[http://www.leaonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S15327930PJE7504\\_8](http://www.leaonline.com/doi/abs/10.1207/S15327930PJE7504_8)

#### The Limits of Sanctions in Low-Performing Schools: A Study of Maryland and Kentucky Schools on Probation

The article reports on a study of 11 schools that were labeled as low-performing by the state accountability systems of Maryland and Kentucky, nationally known for complex performance-based assessments. The study shows that putting schools on probation only weakly motivated teachers because the assessments were largely perceived as unfair, invalid, and unrealistic. Administrators responded with control strategies that rigidified organizations, forestalling dialog and learning processes. Instructional reform developed only feebly. On the other hand, some schools remedied inefficiencies and were able to "harvest the low-hanging fruit." The schools struggled with severe problems of teacher commitment.

Mintrop, H. (2003, January 15). The limits of sanctions in low-performing schools: A study of Maryland and Kentucky schools on probation, *Education Policy Analysis Archives*, 11 (3). Retrieved July 24, 2003 from <http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v11n3.html>.

#### Critique of "An Evaluation of the Florida A-Plus Accountability and School Choice Program"

In 1999, Florida adopted the "A-Plus" accountability system, which included a provision that allowed students in certain low-performing schools to receive school vouchers. In a recently released report, *An Evaluation of the Florida A-Plus Accountability and School Choice Program* (Greene, 2001a), the author argued that early evidence from this program strongly implies that the program has led to significant improvement on test scores in schools threatened with vouchers. However, a careful analysis of Greene's findings and the Florida data suggests that these strong effects may be largely due to sample selection, regression to the mean, and problems related to the aggregation of test score results.

By Gregory Camilli & Katrina Bulkley: Education Policy Analysis Archives: 2001

[\(http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v9n7/\)](http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v9n7/)

#### The Effects of Vouchers on School Improvement: Another Look at the Florida Data

The pattern of score improvements on the FCAT ought to give Florida officials pause and trigger a serious research effort to identify potentially harmful imbalances and deficiencies in the A-Plus program. Until a far better understanding of and experience with the Florida accountability system is at hand, Greene's brave generalization from the Florida data he examined to the desirability of a nation-wide implementation is premature at best. It appears that the program's strong attention to the lower portion of the score distribution and the aggressive efforts to improve test scores in that region have produced substantial unintended consequences.

By Haggai Kupermintz; Education Policy Analysis Archives: 2001

[\(http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v9n8/\)](http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v9n8/)



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