



Title: Using High Stakes Testing to Make Students and Schools Accountable for Learning

Background: Over the past ten years, the majority of U.S. states have enacted some form of High Stakes Testing to evaluate student performance. When President George Bush enacted the “No Child Left Behind” legislation in January 2002, it changed the role of the U.S. government in public schools. While the legislation is aimed at creating better schools through increased funding and raising student achievement, its primary focus is on the use of standardized tests to evaluate results. The problem lies in the quality of tests being administered. Each state is responsible for designing their own testing program including setting standards and developing test content, reporting results, and soon, showing “adequate progress” toward meeting state standards each year. In addition, the results of these tests are then compared with National Assessment of Educational Progress standards to see if they are rigorous enough. As a result of this legislation, many states are now creating testing programs so rigorous that many students, some of them extremely successful, cannot pass. In some states literally thousands of students are repeating grades year after year because they cannot pass the High Stakes Test established by the state. Students who have successfully completed all the coursework necessary to earn high school diplomas and enter college are kept from graduating because of their inability to pass High Stakes Tests. In addition, many of the tests do not take into account the needs of students with disabilities. Nationally there have been a number of successful lawsuits against the use of these tests, particularly when failure to pass the exam results in students being unable to graduate. A number of lawsuits against High Stakes Testing are currently pending nationwide.

Grade Levels: Grades 9-12

Subject Areas: Sociology, Philosophy, Psychology, Modern Problems, Language Arts, and Debate

Learning Objectives:

Students will:

1. Participate in an informal survey about their views on high stakes testing and use basic computation skills to evaluate results as a group.
2. Participate in class discussion activities related to high stakes testing and “No Child Left Behind” legislation and use reasons, facts, and examples to support their opinions throughout these discussions.
3. Use notetaking skills to record facts and information about high stakes testing and the attitudes related to it while viewing a video and various Internet resources.
4. Participate in a class brainstorming session and creation of a PROS and CONS graphic organizer related to high stakes testing.
5. Compare and contrast informational data about high stakes testing.
6. Utilize group work and discussion skills to complete a chart representing the group’s ideas about who should be responsible for student learning.
7. Utilize what they have learned from informational sources and class discussions to develop an individual accountability plan to outline who will be responsible for their learning and how they will accomplish the goals they have set.

Relevant National Standards:

This lesson correlates to the national McREL standards located online at <http://www.mcrel.org/standards-benchmarks>

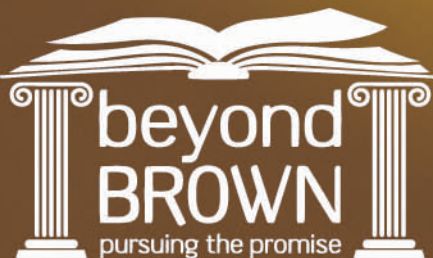
Behavioral Studies

Standard 3: Understands that interactions among learning, inheritance, and physical development affect human behavior

Standard 4: Understands conflicts, cooperation, and interdependence among individuals, groups, and institutions

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Math

Standard 2: Understands and applies basic and advanced properties of the concepts of numbers

Language Arts

Writing

Standard 4: Gathers and uses information for research purposes

Reading

Standard 7: Uses reading skills and strategies to understand and interpret a variety of informational texts

Listening and Speaking

Standard 8: Uses listening and speaking strategies for different purposes

Viewing

Standard 9: Uses viewing skills and strategies to understand and interpret visual media

Thinking and Reasoning

Standard 1: Understands and applies basic principles of presenting an argument

Standard 5: Applies basic trouble-shooting and problem-solving techniques

Standard 6: Applies decision-making techniques

Working with Others

Standard 1: Contributes to the overall effort of a group

Standard 4: Demonstrated effective interpersonal communication skills

Self Regulation

Standard 1: Sets and manages goals

Standard 2: Performs self-appraisal

Estimated Time:

The lesson will take 2-3 forty-five minute class periods for completion.

Materials Needed:

- television and vcr for viewing the film
- computers with Internet access or photocopies of resource materials listed in plan
- Who's Accountable for Student Learning Worksheet (provided with plan)

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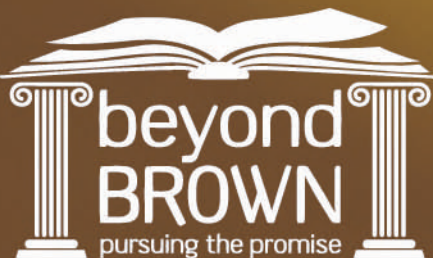
Procedures:

Part 1: Forming Opinions About High Stakes Testing

1. To create interest in the subject of high stakes testing, begin by asking students to answer the three survey questions below. They must answer YES or NO to each question.
 - Would you be willing to give up receiving grades for each of your high school classes and take one final exam at the end of your senior year to see if you learned what you were supposed to master throughout grades 9-12?
 - Do you believe you could earn a passing grade of 80% or higher on a comprehensive test like this?
 - If you were unable to pass the final test at the end of your senior year, would you stay in school and try to retake the test in order to receive your diploma?
2. As a class, tabulate the results of this survey. Record the number of YES and NO answers for each question and determine the percentage of students this constitutes.
3. Based upon the percentages, conduct a short class discussion about why students answered the survey questions the way they did. Address questions such as:
 - What are the pros and cons taking a comprehensive test as senior?
 - Why did students think they would or would not pass this type of test?
 - What reasons did students have for choosing to stay in school or not if they were unable to pass a comprehensive test?
4. Now that students have had time to think about this type of testing scenario, explain to them that what they will be learning about is something called “High Stakes Testing” and the way it is and may be used in school across the country. Have students view the “Beyond Brown” program segment “Did You Pass the Test?” from 44:35 to 53:49. As students are viewing, encourage them to note specific facts and areas of concern related to high stakes testing.
5. When viewing is completed, facilitate a class discussion using questions such as:
 - How would you feel if you were not promoted to the next grade or if you were kept from receiving your diploma because of the results of one test?
 - If a student is earning above average grades and has received academic awards and honors, how is it possible for the student to fail a test over subjects where they have demonstrated mastery, even when they have multiple chances to take the test?
 - In your opinion, are students really learning what they are supposed to from their classes, or are they doing what is needed to earn their grades but not retaining the information?
 - From what you learned from the film and class discussion so far, why do you think states have begun to focus on the high stakes testing of students?
 - Do you think High Stakes Testing is Fair?

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6. To provide students with more background about High Stakes Testing, they must have some knowledge about President Bush's "No Child Left Behind" legislation. Using resources such as PBS's "Frontline" and its focus on "Testing In Our Schools" at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/schools/nochild/>, provide students with background about this education reform bill. Be sure to explain the goal of this legislation and the positive results it is designed to produce. In addition, have students visit the Beyond Brown site's "For Educators" section at <http://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/foreducators/> to review the survey statistics about American attitudes related to school performance.
7. To get students thinking more about both sides of the High Stakes Testing issue, have the class work together to create PRO and CON lists showing what students see as the positives and negatives associated with High Stakes Testing. Record this information on large chart paper, the overhead, or on the board so all students can see and contribute to the discussion.
8. Using the map from the PBS program "Frontline" and its focus on "Testing In Our Schools" at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/schools/state/>, investigate as a group the current testing standards for your state. Focus specifically on what subjects are tested, at what grade level tests are taken, the types of tests given, and whether or not test scores are tied to graduation. This will help students see how their state compares with what is required of other students such as those from the film segment.

Part 2: Who's Accountable for Student Learning

9. Students should now have the necessary background to understand the basics of the High Stakes Testing issue. What comes next is looking at who is ultimately accountable for student learning and what should be done to make sure students are leaving school with the skills necessary for today's world. Begin this part of the lesson by asking:
 - Who should be held responsible for making sure all students learn what they need in school? Brainstorm and record a complete list of ideas as a group. (Most lists will probably consist of students, teacher, and parents as those to be held primarily responsible for learning)
10. Assign students to work in small groups. Group members should work together to decide what the exact responsibilities of each person or group of people from the list above should be. In addition, the group should discuss how the people or groups should work together to meet the responsibilities. Finally, the students should brainstorm a list of reasonable rewards and consequences for students meeting their learning goals. To facilitate this group work, have students use the Who's Accountable for Student Learning Worksheet. Each student should have a copy of the worksheet so they can use their ideas to in their own accountability plan. Be sure that students complete all parts of the worksheet and subsequent activities completely.
11. Once students have finished the group work portion of the Who's Accountable for Student Learning Worksheet, each student should take time to create their own accountability plan. Encourage students to share their plans with their parents and other teachers.
12. Once accountability plans have been completed, facilitate a final class discussion about what students discussed and learned from completing the worksheet. Use the questions from the worksheet to facilitate this discussion.

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Evaluation Ideas:

1. Students could receive participation grades for involvement in class discussion and group work activities.
2. Individual completion grades could be assigned for the individual accountability plan assignment.
3. Students could use a self-evaluation to review the success of their individual accountability plan after a set amount of time (i.e. a week, month, etc.) of use.

Extension Activities:

1. Have students learn more about the various High Stakes Testing programs in place nationwide by comparing what is currently in use in at least 5 different states. Students could use reported data from independent sources to draw conclusions about the effectiveness of High Stakes Testing in raising student achievement levels.
2. Students could examine the legality of High Stakes Testing using previous court cases based on the use of these tests. Have students research past cases and report the decisions reached in these cases. They could then compare the cases to current those currently being heard by the courts and make predictions about what the court will decide about each case.
3. Students could express their opinions about High Stakes testing by contacting their state representatives and voicing their opinions about the effectiveness of this type of testing.

Online Resources:

Frontline

Learn more about high stakes testing from the "Testing In Our Schools" section at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/schools/nochild/>
Use the map from this PBS program section entitled "Testing In Our Schools" at <http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/schools/state/>, to learn about current testing standards in each state.

Beyond Brown: Pursuing the Promise

Visit the "For Educators" section to review survey statistics from "A Report by Ellis Cose" to see American opinions about school performance at <http://www.pbs.org/beyondbrown/foreducators/>

NOW with Bill Moyers

Get information about "No Child Left Behind" legislation at <http://www.pbs.org/now/society/nclb.html>

Newshour

Read about other students who have been negatively affected by high stakes testing in "Testing the Tests" http://www.pbs.org/newshour/bb/education/jan-june01/testingtests_01-24.html

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AERA Policies

The article, "AERA Position Statement Concerning High Stakes Testing in PreK-12 Education" looks at the issues surrounding high stakes testing. Read the article at <http://www.aera.net/about/policy/stakes.htm>

About the Author:

Lisa Prosocki is an independent educational consultant who taught middle school and high school English, social studies, reading, and technology courses for twelve years. Prosocki has worked extensively with PBS authoring and editing many lesson plans for various PBS programs and Teacher-Source. In addition to conducting workshops for teachers at various state and national meetings, Prosocki also works with many corporate clients creating training programs and materials, facilitating leadership and operations workshops, and providing instructional support for new program rollouts. Prosocki has authored one book and also serves as an editor for other writers of instructional materials.

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Name: _____

Date: _____

Who's Accountable for Student Learning Worksheet

Directions: Work with your group members to decide who is accountable for student learning by completing the steps and answering the questions below.

Table Data (complete all of the steps below to fill in the Accountability Table)

1. Using the brainstorming list you created, record all of the people/groups who are responsible for making sure students learn what they are supposed to in school in the table below.
2. Next, list the responsibilities each person/group has for seeing that students learn. For example, if students are on your list, then completing class assignments could be one of their responsibilities. Please your ideas for each group in the "Responsibilities" column.
3. In the "Working with Others" column, describe specific things each person/group should do to work with the other groups to meet the responsibilities. For example, if students are on your list, then they could work with others by making them aware of questions they have about what they are learning or by keeping them informed about major assignments, projects, and tests.
4. In the "Rewards" column, describe specific things each person/group could earn for helping students learn what is required. For example, if students are on your list, then one of their rewards could be a good grade earned on an assignment or project or a special privilege earned as the result of a good grade on a test or assignment.
5. In the "Consequences" column, describe specific consequences each person/group should expect if they do not take an active role in meeting their responsibility for student learning. For example, if students are on your list, then one of the consequences for not being a responsible learner could be earning a poor grade on an assignment or test or losing a privilege because of poor performance.

Opinion Questions (Use what you have learned to discuss and record your answer for each question)

1. In your opinion, is it possible for a student to be successful in school but not learn anything? Explain?
2. Students know they must be active participants in the learning process. In your opinion, what does this look and sound like for students in the classroom?
3. In your opinion, what makes a good teacher?
4. When parents are actively involved in a student's school experience, what are some of the specific things they say and do to show their support for the student in relation to school issues?

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Who's Accountable for Student Learning Worksheet

5. If you could list the three most important things students must do or have in order to be successful in school, what would they be?

Your Accountability Plan (On a separate sheet of paper, copy the following information and supply ideas for each category to create your own accountability plan.)

In order to have a more successful school experience, three things I plan to do to improve myself are:

-
-
-

People/groups who could help me achieve these goals are:

-
-

I plan to ask these people/groups to help me by:

-
-
-
-

My plan for helping myself achieve these goals is to:

-
-
-

I will know I have been successful when:

-
-

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Who's Accountable for Student Learning Worksheet

Accountability Table

People/Groups

Responsible for Learning	Responsibilities	Working with Others	Rewards	Consequences

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