



New York State Reading Association's Position Statement about Statewide Testing

The New York State Reading Association (NYSRA) is comprised of over 2500 literacy specialists, classroom teachers, teacher educators, researchers, librarians, and parents throughout the State. The purpose of the association is to promote literacy education in New York. NYSRA provides on-going professional literacy education of teachers, and it advocates for the teaching of reading before governmental and professional bodies.

Teachers, students, and their families have first-hand knowledge about New York State's over-reliance on standardized testing to measure student learning and teacher effectiveness. Nearly everyday newspapers publish stories about how meaningful classroom learning activities are put aside for test preparation (e.g., Johnson, 2012), district and building leaders feel pressured to distort reports of their students' test results (e.g., Rich, 2013; Winerap, 2013), and many children exhibit stress and anxiety on statewide testing days (e.g., Bronson & Merryman, 2013).

The International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English (IRA/NCTE, 2009; NCTE 2011) have previously called on educational policy makers to use reason when instituting new policies and regulations about standardized testing. Yet despite IRA's and NCTE's position statements regarding assessment, standardized testing thrives in New York schools, and many districts and buildings have become frenzied in preparing their students for these tests. NYSRA believes current testing policies interfere with high quality literacy instruction.

The assessment of student learning and teacher performance is fraught with complexity that cannot be adequately answered with the current testing policies. The International Reading Association and National Council of Teachers of English argue, "Assessment must recognize and reflect the intellectually and socially complex nature of reading and writing and the important roles of school, home, and society in literacy development" (NCTE/IRA, 2009, Standard 5). High stakes testing, such as that currently taking place throughout New York State, is having negative and counter-productive effects on our students, teachers, and schools.

NYSRA believes all children can learn to read and write well. At the same time it knows that poverty compromises children's learning and development. The literacy performance of children from under-resourced schools and communities cannot be meaningfully assessed with the current testing practices. Literacy assessment should be balanced and include multiple measures of reading and writing performance over time. The International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English have already explained the importance of using multiple measures to assess children's literacy growth: "Assessment should include multiple perspectives and sources of data" (NCTE/IRA, 2009, Standard 8).

The current obsession with standardized testing to measure children's learning and teachers' performance is misdirecting essential education resources. Throughout the state, and particularly

in low-income districts, more time is increasingly spent on test preparation instead of teaching. Classroom teachers and literacy specialists are pressured to teach to the test rather than foster deep learning of the subject areas and motivate students to read and write. Programs for teachers' professional development often focus on students' test preparation rather than on effective and engaging teaching practices. New York State's testing policies are costly in time, resources, and finances.

An important goal of NYSRA is to “promote policies, practices, and procedures that support literacy” (NYSRA, 2013). Accordingly, the NYSRA Board of Directors asserts the following about statewide policies regarding the uses of testing in the English language arts:

1. End the excessive reliance on test scores to assess student learning and teacher effectiveness in New York schools (adapted from NCTE, 2011).
2. Recognize that the current obsession with standardized test scores leads to teaching to the test, distortion of the curriculum, and an overall failure to motivate students to read and write.
3. Develop policies that recognize that standardized testing is only one of many ways to measure student learning and teacher effectiveness (adapted from NCTE, 2011).
4. Develop policies recognizing that children's test performance is compromised by poverty and communities lacking learning supports routinely found in middle and upper income neighborhoods (e.g., public libraries, theaters, Internet access, etc.).
5. Support ongoing classroom-based assessments consistent with the NCTE/IRA 2009 Standards for the Assessment of Reading and Writing (NCTE, 2011).
6. Involve all stakeholders in the educational community—students, families, teachers, administrators, policymakers, and the public—in the development, interpretation, and reporting of assessment information (adapted from NCTE/IRA, 2009).
7. Evaluate teachers based on comprehensive measures of effectiveness, such as observations of instruction, teacher portfolios, parent responses, and increases in achievement as evidenced by authentic curriculum-based assessments (adapted from NCTE, 2011).

References

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