Questions for this session

- How are high-stakes tests affecting instruction?
- How does instruction affect test scores on high-stakes tests?
- Can school leaders make sure students are well prepared AND produce high scores?
How are high-stakes tests affecting instruction?
Frequently cited negative effects of high-stakes tests

► Narrow the curriculum
► Exclude topics either not tested or not likely to appear on the test
► Reduce learning to the memorization of easy-to-recall facts
► Demand too much classroom time for test preparation rather than learning.
Problem with most of the articles on high-stakes tests

► vast majority are anecdotal

► can’t tell us if incidents are isolated or widespread
Teachers think the emphasis on testing will distort instruction, yet few say it affects their own teaching.

Testing will lead to "teaching to the test" instead of "real learning" (79% agree, 20% disagree)

Testing has caused "real learning" to be neglected in own classroom (26% agree, 73% disagree)

SOURCE: Public Agenda, 2003 (results from late-2001 survey)
The public is concerned about teaching to the test, but their concern is declining.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emphasis on Testing</th>
<th>2003</th>
<th>2005</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encourages teaching to the test</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>58</td>
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<tr>
<td>Teaching to the test is a bad thing</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>54</td>
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SOURCE: Phi Delta Kappan/Gallup poll, 2005
The public overall supports annual testing but is worried it could go too far.

- Main concern – dependence on single test for major decisions
- Two-thirds think a single test does not provide a fair picture of school performance

SOURCES: Public Agenda & PDK/Gallup polls
New survey: NCLB forcing districts to narrow curriculum

► 71% of districts reported reducing time in at least one subject to provide more time for reading & math

► Respondents divided over whether this was good or bad
  - Some thought it shortchanged students
  - Others thought it helped them help low-achieving students

SOURCE: Center on Education Policy, 2006
Frequently cited positive effects of high-stakes tests

► Provide a valid, external measure of the academic program

► Motivate schools and students to work hard

► Assure that all students get the benefit of high academic standards
Is high-stakes testing good educational policy?
Ed research as soap opera

► Amrein & Berliner looked at state scores against NAEP over time & found no transfer of gains
► Raymond & Hanushek looked at same data and concluded the opposite
► Rosenshine narrowed analysis to states with high-stakes tests compared to NAEP & found a strong relationship
► Amrein & Berliner re-examined their data & found some differences but accounted for them by student exclusions
► Braun then compared high-stakes to low-stakes states and found strong relationship of high-stakes to achievement
► John Bishop included other countries & found strong positive relationship between exit exams & achievement
► Swanson looked at 10 years of standards-based policies & also found a positive relationship in mathematics
How does high-stakes testing affect instruction?

- Bad effects are documented but research doesn’t tell us how widespread they are.
- More analysts find a positive relationship to achievement than don’t, especially for low-income students.
- It’s hard to separate the effects of high-stakes testing from the effects of different accountability mechanisms.
Experts on both sides agree that accountability systems and the tests on which they depend are in their infancy and will need a great deal of refinement as they develop.

-- Ruth Mitchell
How does instruction affect scores on high-stakes tests?
Teaching to the test can be

► Good if it means teaching a curriculum aligned to state standards and emphasizing higher order skills

► Bad if it means memorizing the content on test items and emphasizing test-taking skills
CELA study of literacy skills

- 5-year study of 25 middle- and high-schools

- Schools in CA, FL, TX and NY

- Compared “typical” and “high” performers as measured by state tests

SOURCE: Langer, 2000
What the CELA study found in high-performing schools

► Literacy skills are taught in rich and varied lesson types

► Reading & writing are taught across the curriculum

► “Test preparation” is integrated across the curriculum and emphasis is on literacy, not test-taking skills

SOURCE: Langer, 2001
California study of high-poverty schools

- In-depth survey of 257 elementary schools and 5500 principals & teachers

- Compared low-, mid- and high-performing schools

- High-performers scored as much as 250 points higher on CA’s 200-1000 API scale
What the California study found in high-performing schools:

- Priority on student achievement
- Aligned curriculum to state standards
- Used assessment data to inform and adjust instruction
- Principals ensured there were adequate resources, especially qualified teachers

SOURCE: Williams & Kirst, 2005
CEP study on effects of NCLB

- Survey of education officials in 50 states and 299 representative districts
- Case studies of 38 school districts

SOURCE: Center on Education Policy, 2006
What the CEP study found

► 9 in 10 districts reported aligning curriculum & instruction to standards & assessments

► 9 in 10 reported using research & test data to inform instructional decisions

SOURCE: Center on Education Policy, 2006
What the CEP study found

► 3 in 4 districts reported success with these strategies

► 3 in 4 ranked district policies as important or very important to raising student achievement

SOURCE: Center on Education Policy, 2006
What instruction produces higher test scores?

- Curriculum is aligned to state standards & tests
- Student achievement data informs instruction & supports
- Test preparation is embedded and does not take up a lot of valuable class time
- Lessons emphasize student learning & higher order thinking
Can school leaders make sure students are well prepared AND produce high scores?
What to do at the district level:

► Make sure teachers have a curriculum aligned to state standards & tests

► Encourage curriculum & lesson plans that reinforce literacy and math skills across the curriculum

► If needed, provide professional development on how to use data to inform decisions from the board to the classroom
What to do at the district level:

► Invest in aligned “low stakes” benchmark assessments

► Administer district assessments in subjects other than reading & math to signal their importance

► Use rich, open-ended assessments to encourage higher order thinking
Consider the human factor

Don’t let fear take charge of your district
Toward better assessments & accountability plans

► Some tests are better targets than others. Be familiar with your state’s test; push for good standardized tests

► Be constructive advocates for effective accountability systems
More is being learned about testing and accountability systems

The Center for Public Education will stay on top of these developments and provide new research as it emerges
Questions?