How are High Stakes Tests Affecting High School Students?

Lisa Reither
J.D., University of San Francisco
M.A.E., Pepperdine University
Greetings!

Please share where you are from and what role you have in education (parent, educator, student, etc.)
OVERVIEW OF HIGH STAKES TESTS

High Stakes Tests are exams that determine which opportunities a student is eligible for. This presentation discusses students’ experiences with the CAHSEE, an exam that determines whether or not a student will receive a high school diploma in California, and the SAT, an exam that must be taken in order to apply to many colleges and universities in the U.S..

24 states currently require students to pass a minimum competency exam in order to receive a high school diploma [National Center for Education Statistics, 2014]]

21 states plan to continue high school exit exam policies in ELA and math under the Common Core Standards. These tests are projected to be more rigorous than current exams. [Hyslop, 2014]

California public school students have been required to pass the CAHSEE in order to earn a high school diploma since 2006. Implementation of CAHSEE purports to ensure that graduates can demonstrate high school graduate level competency in reading, writing, and math. However, CAHSEE tests 7th and 8th grade math, algebra, and 9th and 10th grade English Language Arts based on the previous California State Standards.

51% of universities require SAT, ACT, or other college admissions test in order to be considered eligible for admission. [National Center for Education Statistics, 2011]
High Stakes Tests Are Institutionalized Discrimination

Sonia Nieto (1992) defines institutionalized discrimination as "[t]he harmful policies and practices within institutions . . . that reflect the biases and negative perceptions of individuals towards members of other groups, on the basis of gender, ethnicity, social class, language, or other perceived differences." (pp. 36-37).

For both the CAHSEE and SAT, Whites and some Asian races consistently outperform African Americans and Latinos. High-SES students consistently outperform economically disadvantaged students [Maudus & Clarke, 2001; Heise, 2009; West-Falcoln, 2009; National Center for Education Statistics, 2014]

This disparate impact systematically renders African American, Latino, and economically disadvantaged students ineligible for many post-secondary educational opportunities and thus have an adverse and discriminatory effect on equal opportunity in higher education.
High Stakes Tests Are Institutionalized Discrimination

- Requiring these exams as a matter of policy is institutional discrimination.
- They are implemented by state and federal educational institutions.
- They contain inherent biases, favoring White and wealthy students.
- They systematically and disproportionately render many minority and economically disadvantaged students ineligible for diplomas and post-secondary educational opportunities.
- They act as psychological inhibitors that damage students’ concept of the “academic-self” and limit students’ beliefs in their abilities.
- They do not effectively achieve their policy objectives and justifications.
- They do not accurately distinguish between students who should or should not receive a high school diploma or be eligible for higher educational opportunities.
High Stakes Tests Are Institutionalized Discrimination

- % Persons over Age 25 who have NOT received a High School Diploma or Equivalency
  - 14.3% National [Census.gov, 2014]
  - 19.4% California [California Department of Education, 2014]

- 4.5% of students in 2014 didn’t pass the California high school exit exam. [Human Resources Organization 2104]

- This adds up to slightly more than 20,000 students who didn’t receive diplomas. [Edsource.org, 2013]

- CAHSEE purports to identify students who are not developing essential skills and encourages districts to give these students the resources they need. [California Department of Education, 2014]

  - In response to a lawsuit filed in 2006 alleging low-income students were not receiving an equal opportunity to learn the material on the test, **Assembly Bill 347** required districts to provide additional instruction for students who had not passed the test by the end of 12th grade, by letting them remain in school for a fifth year through a special CAHSEE tutoring class. [Edsource.org, 2013]

  - In 2009, the state eliminated mandated funding for CAHSEE interventions for summer school and intensive instruction during the academic year. A majority of districts have since used the money earmarked for exit exam interventions for different programs. [Edsource.org, 2013]
High Stakes Tests Are Institutionalized Discrimination

Of the 20,000 or so students in the class of 2013 who didn’t pass the exam, no one knows how many of them have met all other requirements for graduation. [Human Resources Research Organization, 2013]

There is an estimated increase of one to four percent in the number of grade twelve students who do not graduate on time due solely to the CAHSEE requirement [Human Resources Research Organization 2012]

A significant number of students who do not meet the CAHSEE requirement in four years continue to try to pass the CAHSEE in their fifth year.” [Human Resources Research Organization 2014]

% Persons over Age 25 who have NOT received a Bachelor’s Degree or Higher

- 71.5% National
- 69.5% California [Census.gov, 2014]

In many colleges and universities, the Black and Latino share of the population today is less than it was in 1995 when California voters banned the use of affirmative action in colleges. [Los Angeles Times, 2013]

It is projected that “[b]y 2020, 65 percent of all available jobs will demand some postsecondary training, often a two- or four-year degree.” [Hyslop, 2014; cew.georgetown.edu/recovery2020]
High Stakes Tests Do Not Meet Policy Objectives

- **Fair and Equal Opportunity Assessment** is not implemented
  - the exams are not able to measure pure aptitude or achievement because biases, rather than competency, may account for many scores [Stringer, 2008; Ullucci & Spencer, 2009]
  - A simple math and literacy exam does not account for all students’ overall high school achievement or college preparedness
  - Important attributes aside from math and literacy skills are not measured
  - In particular, SAT scores of African Americans do a poor job of predicting success in college [West-Falcoln, 2009]

- **Greater Achievement** is not reached
  - Current drop out rate for African Americans and Latinos is disproportionately high
  - Current college entrance rate for African Americans and Latinos is disproportionately low
  - The National Research Council Committee on Incentives and Test-Based Accountability found that across the nation, high school exit exams have not increased student achievement, but have on average decreased graduation rates. [National Research Council, 2011]
High Stakes Tests Do Not Meet Policy Objectives

- **Teaching and Learning** are not improved
  - Low performing schools continually limit curriculum in order to teach to the test and avoid sanctions. [Ullucci & Spencer, 2009]
  - Tests that make promotion/retention decisions increase drop out rates and educational attainment, and provide no benefit to retained students. [Adams, Robelen & Shah, 2012]

- **Student Motivation** is not improved because
  - Such tests often decrease student motivation and lead to high student retention and drop out rates. [Ullucci & Spencer, 2009]
  - Motivation is variable by individual and depends on several factors and sociological and psychological influences. [Kornhaber & Orfield, 2001]
  - High stakes tests do not motivate the unmotivated. [Maudus & Clarke, 2001]
  - Low test scores damage student conceptions of the Academic Self and limit student engagement.

- **Economic Productivity** is not improved
  - Measures of cognitive skills are not good indicators of economic productivity. They fail to measure workplace skills such as initiative, creativity, persistence, cooperation, specific job skills, or ability to function well within the workplace culture. [Kornhaber & Orfield, 2001]
  - High stakes tests have only shown a nominal link to worker productivity. [Levin, 2001]
Inherent Biases of High Stakes Tests

- **Content** is biased where students have had little or no exposure to cultural items or academic concepts on standardized exams.

- **Expectation Contamination** occurs when question features trigger schemas and expectations developed from students‘ previous experiences with other classroom tests, textbooks, and mock exams resulting in questions being interpreted differently by different students. [Crisp, Sweiry, Ahmed, & Pollitt, 2008]

- **High Cut Scores** that distinguish passing from failing are cut high when compared with score distributions

- **Inadequate Preparation** creates a biased advantage favoring economically advantaged students with more resources such as experienced teachers, enriched curriculum, more and better materials, technology, preparation courses, etc.
RESEARCH QUESTION

- High Stakes exams systematically render minority and low income students ineligible for post-secondary education at a disproportionate rate when compared to White and economically advantaged students.

- How do students’ experiences with these exams differ based on their demographics?

- What are the psychological and experiential implications of students subjected to discriminatory exams?

- This study asks High School students’ about their experiences with the CAHSEE and SAT exams.
Methods

• Project utilized Phenomenological Research conducted from 2011-2013
• Designed to study challenges in schools.
• Qualitative in its approach.
• Examination of students perceptions.
  • Collected ‘self-evaluative’ responses from seniors in 3 Southern California high schools.
  • Analysis examines whether experiences with the CAHSEE and SAT impacts students’ perception of academic-self and/or future educational opportunities.
  • Students’ experiences are compared to their respective racial and economic demographics
Questionnaire

In attempting to understand a relationship between students' experience with high stakes tests and demographic background, an open ended questionnaire was administered to high school seniors at 3 southern California schools.

Questionnaire collected:
- Students’ demographic data
- Experiences with the CAHSEE
- Experiences with the SAT exam
- Post-high school career plans

The students’ responses were collected:
- During school hours
- In a randomly selected general education/elective course
- Students turned in questionnaires immediately upon completion
- Each questionnaire was assigned an anonymous identification code
- Data was utilized from questionnaires where consent to use the data was given
- Qualitative data was examined for analysis
School A’s Community in 2012

- Coastal
- 91% White, 1.2% African American, 2.6% Asian, 6.1% Latino
- 96.9% of the population 25 years of age or older have a High School Diploma or Equivalency
- 59.6% Hold Bachelor’s degree or higher
- Median Household Income $125,202
- 71.5% Home Ownership
- Median Value of owner occupied housing units $1,000,001
- 6.3% Persons living below poverty

[Census.gov 2014]
School B’s Community in 2012

- Urban
- 37.2% White, 25.8% African American, 0.2% Asian, 72.6% Latino
- 46.2% of persons over 25 years of age have a High School Diploma or Equivalency
- 5.5% of persons over 25 years of age that hold Bachelor’s degree or higher
- Median Household Income $29,174
- 32.1% Home Ownership
- Median Value of owner occupied housing units $248,400
- 38.9% Persons living below poverty

[Census.gov 2014]
School C’s Community in 2013

- Urban
- 26.3% White, 22.3% African American, 0.9% Asian, 75.4% Latino
- 44.6% of persons over age 25 have a High School Diploma or Equivalency
- 6.3% over age 25 hold a Bachelor’s degree or higher
- Median Household Income $27,071
- Median Value of owner occupied housing units $282,000
- 38.7% Income below the poverty level

[Census.gov 2014]
School A’s School Demographics 2012

- School A had 1,152 students
  - 82.3% White
  - 10.6% Latino
  - 2.8% Asian
  - 2.0% African American
  - 2.3% Other

- 11.8% of students received free or reduced lunch
- 0.1% of students are English Learners

[Los Angeles Times, 2012]
School A’s Test Scores 2012

In 2011

- API was 862
- 52.7% of students scored proficient or above on STAR tests in math
- 76.7% scored proficient or above in English

The average SAT score is 1665/2400

- 561/800 Math
- 547/800 Reading
- 557/800 Writing

[Los Angeles Times, 2012]
School B’s School
Demographics 2012

- 4,337 students
  - 90.3% Latino
  - 8.6% African American
  - 0.2% Asian
  - 0.2% White
  - 0.8% Other

- 71.3% of students received free or reduced lunch
- 74.0% of students are English Learners

[Los Angeles Times, 2012]
In 2011,
- API was 571,
- 3.9% of students scored proficient or above on STAR tests in math
- 15.9% of students scored proficient or above on STAR tests in English

The average SAT score was 1180/2400 (Source: Los Angeles Times, 2012)
- 392/800 Math
- 388/800 Reading
- 400/800 Writing

[Los Angeles Times, 2012]
School C’s School Demographics 2013

- 1,187 students
- 0.3% White
- 80.6% Latino
- 0.3% Asian
- 18.2% African American
- 0.6% Other

- 83.9% of students received free or reduced lunch
- 26.1% of students were English Learners

[Los Angeles Times, 2014]
School C’s Test Scores 2013

- In 2013
  - API was 626
  - 5.4% of students scored proficient or above on STAR tests in math
  - 26.5% scored proficient or above in English

The average SAT score was 1167/2400
- 387/800 Math,
- 385/800 Reading
- 395/800 Writing

[Los Angeles Times, 2014]
Hypothesis

- The systemic and inherent discrimination imposed by high stakes exams is reflected by the consistent disparity in scores of minority and economically disadvantaged students.

- The presence of a systemic discrimination makes it likely that economically disadvantaged students and racial minorities will have more negative experiences with high stakes exams.

- These negative experiences may manifest as low scores, frustration, fewer post-secondary educational opportunities, as well as have negative psychosocial implications.
Self Reported Student Data: School A

17 participants

Students’ Demographics
- 9 females and 8 males.

Students self-identified as:
- 12 White
- 1 Swedish
- 1 White and Hispanic,
- 1 Armenian,
- 1 Jewish and Irish,
- 1 European, North African, and Middle Eastern.

Household Income was reported as:
- 1 below $20,000
- 1 $90,000 to $125,000
- 7 above $125,000
Self Reported Student Data: 

School A

- Highest level of parent education was reported as:
  - 3 Doctoral/Doctorate/Doctor degree
  - 5 Master’s degree
  - 5 Bachelor's degree
  - 2 Some College
  - 1 12th grade education
  - 1 did not complete 12th

- 3 reported one or more first languages in addition to English
  - 1 Armenian
  - 1 Spanish, French, and German
  - 1 Hebrew

- 16 students indicated a desire to go to college
- 2 reported feeling at risk of not completing high school
Self Reported Student Data: School B

16 participants

Students’ Demographics

- 4 females, 12 males.
- Students self-identified as:
  - 15 Mexican, Latino, Hispanic, or Mexidorian
  - 1 African American.

Household Income was reported as:

- 4 below $20,000
- 3 $20,000 to $45,000
Self Reported Student Data: School B

- Highest level of parent education was reported as:
  - 1 Master's degree
  - 1 Associate’s degree
  - 2 Some College
  - 5 12\textsuperscript{th} grade education
  - 1 10\textsuperscript{th} grade education
  - 1 9\textsuperscript{th} grade education
  - 3 less than 9\textsuperscript{th} grade education

- 11 reported first languages in addition to or other than English
  - 8 Spanish
  - 3 Spanish and English.

- 14 students indicated a desire to go to college

- 6 students felt at risk of not completing high school.
Self Reported Student Data: School C

17 participants

Students’ Demographics
- 9 females and 8 males.

The students self-identified as:
- 13 Hispanic/Latino
- 4 Black (including Caribbean)

Household Income was reported as:
- 8 below $20,000
- 1 $20,000 to $45,000
Self Reported Student Data:

School C

- Highest level of parent education was reported as:
  - 1 Bachelor's degree or higher
  - 5 Some College or AA
  - 2 12th grade education
  - 6 did not complete high school education
  - 2 under 9th grade

- 8 reported Spanish as their first language
- 2 reported Spanish and English as their first language
- 15 students indicated a desire to go to college
Do you feel you are at risk of not completing high school?

School A

- 2 students felt at risk of not completing high school, those who didn’t commented:
  - "No because I live in a community where it is expected or so the 'social norm' to finish high school."
  - "No because I have good grades which would be going to waste if I dropped out."

School B

- 6 students felt at risk of not completing high school
- Reasons include: ‘not having enough credits’, needing to finish a class, not doing make-up work, having trouble in a class, and/or ‘laziness’
- Those who didn’t commented:
  - ”No, I’m on top of everything.”
  - “No, I’m doing my best to complete everything.”
Do you feel you are at risk of not completing high school?

School C

- 1 student felt at risk of not completing high school “because of one class I miss and come late to.”

- Those who felt they were not at risk commented:
  - “I have a very good GPA and my A-K requirements are almost done.”
  - “I feel that I am on task and have the capacity to finish high school.”
  - “I am a very good student.”
CAHSEE
FINDINGS
Students Taking the CAHSEE
Student Perceptions of CAHSEE

Chart Title

- Satisfied With Score
- Questions Were Fair
- Experience Was Fair

School A

School B

School C
Are you *satisfied* with your score on the CAHSEE?

**School A**
- all students who responded were satisfied with their scores because the exam was easy or because they passed it

**School B**
- 11 students indicated they were satisfied with their CAHSEE score because they passed.
- 4 students were unsatisfied with their score for reasons such as they felt rushed, could have done better, or almost made the cut the first time.

**School C**
- 14 students indicated they were satisfied with their scores because they passed, they tried their best, or because they don’t have to take it again.
- 2 students indicated they were unsatisfied with their scores
Do you believe the CAHSEE exam questions were fair?

School A
- 14 students indicated they felt the questions were fair because it was easy or the student felt prepared
  - "How can a test be unfair?"
- 1 student felt the exam questions were unfair

School B
- 11 students indicated they felt the questions were fair because the test was easy and they were familiar with the questions
  - "I think the CAHSEE is the easiest test because all the questions are easy. But in order to do good, you got to pay attention to the class."
  - "Yes, we should already know the questions."
- 2 felt the questions were unfair
  - "No because the questions were not similar to the ones you study before the CAHSEE."
Do you believe the CAHSEE exam questions were fair?

School C

- 15 students indicated they believed the questions were fair because
  - it was easy
  - “they were things you have had to know by then”
  - “They ask you questions based on what you’re being taught and you should know it.”

- 1 student indicated the questions were unfair
  - “they were basically questions I went over with my teacher last semester so I sort of forgot”

- 1 student gave a neutral response.
  - “It was whatever.”
Do you feel your experience taking the exam was fair?

School A

- 13 students felt their experience in taking the exam was fair
  - "Sort of, for me yea because it was easy but it doesn’t mean it’s a complete reflection of every person."
  - “Sure, I was heard the same as all other test takers."

- 1 student felt the exam experience was unfair
  - “No, standardized tests are silly.”
Do you feel your experience taking the exam was fair?

School B

- 12 felt their experience in taking the exam was fair
- “Yes, in order so we can see we are smart.”
- ”Yes because it made me reflect on everything I've learned.”
- ”Yes, I think it was fair we had a big room our own table and [supply was supplied].”
- "I do think it was fair because we learned all that was on the test."
- ”Yes, I was in a good testing area.”
- "In my opinion, yes, I do think it was fair because its an easy test. Weeks before the CAHSEE exam, teachers review lots of subject and that helps a lot of students. I don’t think its fair to some because they goof around a lot in class.”

- 3 felt their experience was unfair.
- “No, they rushed me.”
- “No because I wanted to improve my knowledge.”
Do you feel your experience taking the exam was fair?

School C

- 15 students indicated they felt their CAHSEE experience fair because it was easy, the student passed, or did well
- “Everyone took it at the same time and they all had enough time.”
- “because it [test] you on what you learn”
- “because I prepared for the test”
- “I feel that the experience taking the CAHSEE was fair because I took my time to complete it and after that I was happy that I [pass] it.”
- “It taught me it takes a while to get to college.”
Score’s Ability to Reflect Achievement/Overall Experience

Chart Title

- Score Represents High School Achievement
- Positive Experience
- Negative Experience
- Mixed Experience
- Neutral Experience

- School A
- School B
- School C
Score accurately reflects high school achievements?

School A

- 4 felt their score accurately reflected their high school achievement for reasons such as they passed or did well.
- 6 felt that their CAHSEE score did not accurately reflect their high school achievements.

- “No, I am more than my grades.”
- “No, because a few [] questions can’t do that.”
- ”No because most of those [test] are not a true reflection of intelligence or ability.”
- “No because you learn life lessons and other academic things in high school.”
Score accurately reflects high school achievements?

**School B**

- 10 felt their score accurately reflect their high school achievements
  - "Yes all our knowledge is for a good cause."
  - "Yes because we learn from school."
  - "Yes because it showed my intelligence skills."
  - "Yes I do because it shows how I didn’t pay much attention in school."
  - "Yes I’m not so good at English and the test proves it."
  - "Yes cause I be dumb."

- 5 students felt that their CAHSEE score did not accurately reflect their high school achievements
  - “No, I could have done better."
  - "No because its just a test."
  - "No, it had nothing to do with what I have learned."
Score accurately reflects *high school achievements*?

**School C**

- 8 felt their score accurately reflected their high school achievements because:
  - “it shows how much you know”
  - “it motivated me to keep excelling”
  - “I’ve always done my absolute best and I’ve been a good student.”

- 7 felt their score did NOT accurately reflect their high school achievements
  - Scores don’t reflect achievements such as sports and other accomplishments
  - “I do not believe a [mear] test can reflect upon my high school achievement”
  - “No I actually don’t because I’m doing just fine.”
  - “I know I could do better than that”
  - “No, [test] aren’t for everybody”
Overall Experience/Opinion

School A

- 5 indicated a positive response
  - “It was straightforward and fair in my opinion.”
  - ”Happy I passed, it was pretty easy.”
  - ”It was an accurate reflection of my high school achievements.”

- 6 indicated a neutral response because they felt the test was easy or unchallenging
  - ”I was and still am indifferent.”
  - ”Didn’t really care thought it was going to be easy and it was.”
  - ”I did not study at all, I felt like it was too easy.”
  - ”It took me less than two hours do both English and math.”
  - ”Honestly, we showed up because we had to, got a good night's sleep and so on because we were told to do so. Nothing is relevant to the real world and nothing was learned.”
Overall Experience/Opinion

School B

- 6 indicated a positive experience
  - “The teachers were supportive so it made it easy for me.”
  - “I was a bit worried about math but I passed proficient, experience were important during prep it really helped me.”
  - ”It was a good feeling when they told me that I passed it.”

- 4 indicated a negative experience
  - ”I believe I could have over 400 points on the math part. But they kept rushing me and talking so I had to guess.”
  - “The exam had me a bit stressed out just because I felt like I wasn’t prepared for it.”
  - ”Well to be honest I did not want to take the exam it was stressful and boring.”
  - ”I was worried after I took it I was scared I wasn’t going to pass.”

- 1 indicated a mixed, positive and negative experience
  - ”First two times not passing it was sad, then once preparing it [wert] good.”
Overall Experience/Opinion

**School C**

- 1 student indicated a positive overall experience/opinion
  - I felt that everyone in the school [provide] me with the information to do well in the CAHSEE, no pressure whatsoever”

- 3 students indicated a negative overall experience/opinion
  - “The CAHSEE should not be the reason you are judged on everything you learned in school.”
  - “I felt dumb because I had forgotten how to do 4th grade math.”

- 3 students indicated a mixed overall experience/opinion
  - “The CAHSEE for me in general was easy because I took preparation to make sure I pass it. Before I took the preparation, I felt scared because I thought I wouldn’t pass it.”
  - “Before taking the CAHSEE I was nervous but I knew that I was well prepared. The teachers I had were a really big help for me because they took they’re time to teach us a lot about the CAHSEE. The CAHSEE gets you nervous because it’s a requirement for graduation.”
  - “I worked a lot on math and English. I was nervous towards the end. I guessed a lot. I was happy to know my score.”
SAT
FINDINGS
Students Taking the SAT

Chart Title

- Exam Taken
- Exam Taken More Than Once
- Prep Course Taken

School A  School B  School C
Students Who Have Taken the SAT

School A
- 15 students responded that they took the SAT because it is a college requirement.

School B
- 7 took the SAT in order to go to college.
- 6 did not take the SAT because
  - didn’t have time,
  - missed it,
  - hasn’t applied to college,
  - didn’t need it for junior college
  - it is hard

School C
- 13 students indicated they took the SAT to be competitive for colleges
- 3 students did not take the exam because:
  - It was too late
  - Student was not planning to attend a 4 year university
Student Perceptions of the SAT

Chart Title

- Satisfied With Score
- Questions Were Fair
- Experience Was Fair

School A  
School B  
School C
Are you 

satisfied with your score on the SAT?

School A

- 9 reported they were satisfied with their score
  - "Sure, cause I don’t really care for it and doesn’t effect me."
  - "Sure, its not terrible.”
  - "Yes I got a 780 in math and a 1980 is good."
  - "Yes, I got into a good enough school."
  - "Yes, I don’t think I could do better.”
  - "Yes because I wanted something above a 2000."

- 6 reported they were not satisfied with their scores
  - "No, its below average and does not measure my intelligence by any means.”
  - "No, didn’t prepare too much."
  - "No I could and should have done better.”
  - "No hurt me in the college process.”
  - "No because all of my friends got at least a 2000. My best friend got a 2380."
Are you **satisfied** with your score on the SAT?

School B

- 1 reported being satisfied with his SAT score
- 1 student was unsatisfied for not achieving a higher score

School C

- 5 students indicated they were satisfied with their score
  - “I did pretty good” (1510)
  - “I am still going to college so I guess its good”
  - “Just enough to get me in”
- 3 students indicated they were unsatisfied with their score
  - “I wished I studied to get accepted to a better college”
  - “could have done better”
Do you believe the SAT exam questions were fair?

School A

- 6 felt the questions were fair.
  - "Sure, they work well if you happen to think like they do."

- 1 indicated a neutral response
  - "Some were too hard."

- 8 felt the exam questions were unfair
  - "No, hadn’t learned many of the things."
  - "No, they don’t reflect most of what we have learned."
  - "No, I don’t think that these test show how academically strong a student is."
  - "No because its about being a good test taker which colleges use to decide if your good enough for the school which I think is wrong."
  - “No, people get tutors so it is basically whoever can memorize better. It does not show someone's true worth.”
  - “No the SAT does not prove a person's ability to learn and recite."
Do you believe the SAT exam questions were fair?

**School B**
- 3 reported the SAT questions were fair
- 2 reported the SAT questions were unfair

**School C**
- 5 students felt the questions were fair because:
  - “because it's for college courses”
  - “because it will show what you know”
- 6 students felt the questions were unfair
  - “because they were at college level”
  - “they were difficult”
  - “they are confusing giving students a hard time”
- 1 student indicated a neutral response
  - “Some. Some I never even seen before”
Do you feel your experience taking the exam was fair?

**School A**

- 12 felt their experience in taking the SAT was fair
  - "Sure, I didn’t feel it was unfair."
  - "Sure same as other test takers."
  - "Yes, everyone had equal opportunity."
  - "Yes everyone gets the same questions."
  - "I guess, I am a little bitter."
- 3 did not feel their experience was fair

**School B**

- 1 reported the experience was fair because the student "did good."
- 4 reported they felt their experiences with the SAT were unfair.
  - 1 commented he thought he would have performed better if he had studied.
Do you feel your experience taking the exam was fair?

School C

- 10 students felt the experience was fair
  - “good testing experience”
  - “everyone was treated fairly”
  - “because I learned the experience and how long it took”
  - “the environment was calm”

- 10 students felt the experience was not fair because:
  - “it was [to] hard”
  - “just don’t like testing”
Does your score accurately reflect your level of college preparedness?

Overall Experience/Opinion

Chart Title

- Accurately Reflects College Preparedness
- Overall Positive Experience
- Overall Negative Experience
- Overall Mixed Experience
- Overall Neutral Experience

School A  School B  School C
Score Accurately Reflects College Preparedness?

School A

- 4 felt their scores did reflect their college preparedness.
- 11 felt their scores did not accurately reflect their college preparedness.
  - “No, everyone tests differently, so they shouldn’t have one generalized test for everyone. It’s hard for some kids to complete it in time or are just bad test takers. It doesn’t mean they’re dumb.”
  - ”No, the whole test is BS anyway. Didn’t test properly the things I have to offer. Again, I am more than a grade.”
  - “No, SAT English/Reading Comprehension does not reflect my intelligence.”
  - ”No because it has nothing to do with that.”
  - ”No I don’t think it did because I am a better worker than my score.”
  - ”No I don’t think so. Really dumb people did well smart people did bad it was really all over the place.”
  - ”No I am a slow test taker.”
  - ”Hell no. it did not reflect my creativity or other important qualities. I hate those tests.”
  - ”No I feel like I’m a better student than what my scores were.”
  - ”No because you learn life lessons and other academic things in high school.”
Score Accurately Reflects College Preparedness?

School B
- 3 felt their SAT score accurately reflected their college preparedness.
- 2 felt their SAT score did not accurately reflect their college preparedness.
  - "No because if I [should of have] study, I would of [score] higher."

School C
- 6 students felt their score reflected their college preparedness because:
  - “Probably”
  - “schools were competitive”
  - “because my score was kind of low”
- 4 students felt their score did not reflect their level of college preparedness because:
  - “I could have done better”
  - “A test score doesn’t reflect who you are”
  - “Some things aren’t ready for and it test my [intelligents]. And I feel it puts me in a position where I over think things."
Overall Experience/Opinion

School A

- 11 indicated an overall negative experience
  - "Inaccurate, narrow-minded tests."
  - "It was long, boring."
  - "I know the stress I endured throughout is all is so beyond absurd and as I reflect, already accepted into an amazing school and I question why I fret over it so much but I suppose it had to be done."
  - "I didn’t think it really helps determine what I know. Don’t think its that fair of a test, some people test better than others. I believe it doesn’t reflect the student that I am."
  - "During the test I felt stressed and nervous. It sucked a lot and after I was glad it was over and I could leave," "I felt relieved that it was over."
  - "Had to rush through SAT because I'm a slow test taker.”
  - “Boring, frustrating, hard."
Overall Experience/Opinion

School B
- 1 reported a mixed, positive and negative, experience.
  - "I felt calm, but deep within me was the responsibility to pass that test because I really [wanna] go to college and I needed to pass it."

School C
- 2 students indicated a negative overall experience/opinion
  - "It was boring! It took forever"
  - "It was hard and I got a low score"
- 2 students indicated a Mixed experience/opinion
  - “There [was] manifolds of students. The line to get in took longer than it should. We started late I believe some more time could have been given.”
- 1 student indicated a neutral response
  - It was a very long test it took half of the [] to finish and I was sleepy.
## Comparison Across Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>School A (17 Participants)</th>
<th>School B (16 Participants)</th>
<th>School C (17 Participants)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students reporting a first language in addition to or other than English</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>68.8%</td>
<td>58.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students who feel they are at risk of not completing high school</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>5.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Taking the CAHSEE more than once</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Taking a Prep Course for the CAHSEE</td>
<td>5.9%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students taking the SAT</td>
<td>88.2%</td>
<td>43.8%</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Taking the SAT more than once</td>
<td>70.6%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>35.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students Taking a Prep Course for the SAT</td>
<td>64.7%</td>
<td>12.5%</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
## Post High School Planning

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>School A (17 Participants)</th>
<th>School B (16 Participants)</th>
<th>School C (16 college eligible Participants)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Students Expressing a Desire to go to College</td>
<td>94.1%</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
<td>87.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students that Planned to go to College</td>
<td>94.1%</td>
<td>81.3%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students that Have Applied to College</td>
<td>82.4%</td>
<td>44.8%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Year</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>2 Year 18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Year</td>
<td>52.9%</td>
<td>6.3%</td>
<td>4 Year 56.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students that Were Accepted to College</td>
<td>76.5%</td>
<td>37.5%</td>
<td>75%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 year</td>
<td>17.6%</td>
<td>31.3%</td>
<td>2 Year 18.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 year</td>
<td>47.1%</td>
<td>4 year (CA State) 6.3%</td>
<td>4 Year (State) 56.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
DISCUSSION
Obama’s Blueprint for Reform

The Obama Administration is moving away from the ESEA’s No Child Left Behind provisions linking school funding and accountability for underachievement to results on standardized tests.

Obama admits “NCLB has created incentives for states to lower their standards; emphasized punishing failure over rewarding success; focused on absolute scores, rather than recognizing growth and progress; and prescribed a pass-fail, one-size-fits-all series of interventions for schools that miss their goals.”

In March of 2010, the Obama Administration sent Congress a Blueprint for Reform of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act addressing NCLB and reforms that centers on building on progress.

- Higher standards and better assessments that will prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace
- Ambitious efforts to recruit, prepare, develop, and advance effective teachers and principals, especially in the classrooms where they are most needed
- Smarter data systems to measure student growth and success, and help educators improve instruction
- New attention and a national effort to turn around our lowest-achieving schools.

Congress has not acted to reauthorize ESEA, which is six years overdue for reauthorization to date.

The Obama Administration has offered relief from NCLB provisions through ESEA flexibility in exchange for “rigorous and comprehensive State-developed plans designed to improve educational outcomes for all students, close achievement gaps, increase equity, and improve the quality of instruction.”

To date, 42 states, Puerto Rico and the District of Columbia have received ESEA flexibility.

[United States Department of Education, 2013-14]
Other Federal Programs

The Federal Agenda includes several other programs designed to improve educational outcomes for all students.

- **Race to the Top**: Provides incentives to states engaging systemic education addressing Obamas 4 key objectives. By 2014, the program had dispersed over $4 billion to 19 states. 46 states and the District of Columbia submitted comprehensive reform plans to compete in the Race to the Top competition. 34 states modified state education laws. **48 states worked together to create a voluntary set of rigorous college- and career-ready standards.**

- The U.S. Department of Education's Office for Civil Rights (OCR) released the first comprehensive look at civil rights data from every public school in the country in nearly 15 years. **In response to comprehensive data indicating the opportunity gap among Americans hurts life-transforming opportunities for children, Obama proposed a new initiative called Race to the Top-Equity and Opportunity as part of his budget request. This program would create incentives for states and school districts to change in how they close opportunity and achievement gaps.** Grantees would enhance data systems to sharpen the focus on the greatest disparities and invest in strong teachers and leaders in high-need schools.

- **Redesigning Americas High Schools**: encourages school districts to use existing federal, state and local resources to put in place learning models that are rigorous, relevant, and better focused on real-world experiences, including personalized learning, career and college exploration, college-level coursework or credit, and career-related experiences.

- **Helping Middle Class Families Afford College**: expands federal support for college, amounting to the largest investment in student aid since the G.I. Bill

[United States Department of Education, 2014]
The Future of CAHSEE

The CAHSEE is a graduation requirement for the class of 2015 and possibly beyond even though the questions are based on state standards replaced by Common Core. [California Department of Education, 2014]

In 2010 California adopted the Common Core State Standards and is participating as a governing state in the Smarter/Balanced Assessment Consortium, both purportedly designed to build student college and career readiness by the end of high school. [California Department of Education, 2014]

“The future of CAHSEE remains unclear; it’s an ongoing discussion during this time of transition,” Education department spokeswoman Pam Slater. [EdSource.org 2013]

Recently Senate Bill 172 was proposed by Carol Liu whereby the CAHSEE would be suspended and eliminated as a graduation requirement for several years from 2016-2019 while its role is re-examined. [edsource.org, 2015]
The Future of the CAHSEE

The current overhaul of California’s student testing program is skipping, for now, the California High School Exit Exam. **AB 484**, which seeks to suspend the current California Standards Tests for grades 3 to 8 and 11 does not address the CAHSEE.” [Edsource.org 2013]

“In addition to the use of the CAHSEE as a graduation requirement, the spring CAHSEE administration will continue to be used in calculating the Academic Performance Index for state accountability purposes and Adequate Yearly Progress to meet federal No Child Left Behind requirements.” [California Department of Education, 2015]

The State Superintendent of Public Instruction is developing recommendations to refine the statewide pupil assessment system, including the role of the exit examination. [Human Resources Research Organization, 2014]

California statute mandates that the CAHSEE be reviewed annually through an independent evaluation. [California Department of Education, 2015]. For annual reports by Human Resources Research Organization go to www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/hs/evaluations.asp
Independent Evaluation of CAHSEE 2013-14

- In 2014, the independent evaluation reported, as it had in previous years, that although passing rates for all groups have increased, passing rates for English learners and students with disabilities are low and have increased only modestly since the CAHSEE requirement went into effect. Passing rates for economically disadvantaged, Hispanic, and African American students also continue to be significantly lower than passing rates for white and Asian students at all grade levels.

- Previous reports indicated that graduation rates have varied and dropout rates have increased under CAHSEE. In 2014, the report stated graduation rates have improved and dropout rates have decreased for all groups.

- Despite the reductions in gaps, substantial differences in graduation rates remain, from 68.1 percent among African American students to 91.6 percent for Asian students.

- Nearly a fifth of English learners (21.6%) and African American students (19.7%) in the Class of 2013 dropped out.

[Human Resources Research Organization, 2013-14]
Independent Evaluation of CAHSEE 2013-14

- This study finds a correlation between higher CAHSEE scores and post secondary academic pursuits.

- Many students who are still attempting to meet the CAHSEE requirement in grade twelve no longer plan to attend a four-year college compared to their plan in grade ten to do so, but most still expect to attend community college.

- In 2014, grade twelve students who were still taking the CAHSEE were more likely to believe that the CAHSEE would prevent them from earning a high school diploma than they were in 2012.

[Human Resources Research Organization, 2013-14]
English Learners

- Performance on the CAHSEE continues to improve, but remains low for English learners and Students with Disabilities (SWD). [Human Resources Research Organization, 2014].

- Most of the students who don’t pass the exit exam are in special education programs or are English learners. [Human Resources Research Organization, 2013].

- English Learners will have great difficulty passing at least the ELA portion of the CAHSEE until they achieve proficiency in English and are no longer classified as ELs. [Human Resources Research Organization, 2013]

- SWD and EL students were most likely to say they were unfamiliar with CAHSEE content and item types.

- Results suggest there are also differences in reported content exposure depending on gender, or whether one is classified as economically disadvantaged (ED) or not. [Human Resources Research Organization, 2014].

- Cyndia Velarde (class of 2013, San Jose) immigrated from Guadalajara, Mexico, during middle school. Despite difficulty with English, she passed all her classes and did well on all the CAHSEE practice tests, but did not pass CAHSEE after 6 attempts. Velarde couldn’t graduate and fulfill her dream of getting a high school diploma. [EdSource.org 2013]
Questions

- The critical question to ask is, do high stakes exams and standardized testing schemes benefit all students? If not who benefits from high stakes exams? Who is harmed by high stakes exams?

- How can educators and policy makers remedy educational discrimination for African American, Latino and economically disadvantaged students?
  - Supporting relevant legislation that remedies institutionalized discrimination in public schools.
  - Work to extend awareness of dynamics in testing to students, parents, school staff, administrators, politicians, etc.

- How can educators and policy makers remedy negative psychosocial effects for African American, Latino and economically disadvantaged students?
  - Work directly to improve and correct negative academic self concept in students on a daily basis
  - Provide ongoing, positive, educational support and mentorship