

Cost of Excessive Testing Campaign Toolkit



“It is shameful the money we spend on tests.

These babies need more time with reading specialists,
not less.” Charisse Coleman, Hazelwood NEA, Missouri

How to use this toolkit:

This campaign toolkit contains pieces of a successful campaign to cut back on excessive testing in Hazelwood, Missouri. The components have been modified slightly so they can adapt better to locals throughout the country. Please use the pieces of this campaign that make sense for you and your local association to build power and win concrete victories for the schools our students deserve.

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The Costs of Excessive Testing Campaign

Goal: If we engage our members and potential members on the issue of testing through surveys, 1:1 conversations, and information requests from the district, we can win back learning time for kids and move money to items that will bolster achievement while growing our membership.

Background: Increasingly, districts are signing contracts with for-profit education assessment companies that reduce our children's time to learn and divert tax dollars away from support services like reading specialists and counselors. Educators are calling for a return to a balance of testing and data collection, which will allow us to focus on kids' achievement.



Victory Story: Until May 2015, Hazelwood School District in suburban St. Louis had an assessment system that was all wrong for kids. Students used to lose more than 26 hours of English Language Arts time because they had to take a constant battery of district-mandated tests. Hazelwood NEA was able to reduce the test preparation programs in the district by 5 hours on average and uncover more than \$350,000 per year previously spent on testing. HNEA won back precious hours of learning time for struggling students and uncovered monies that can be used to pay for more reading specialists and smaller class sizes. Key in this victory were member surveys, one-to-one conversations, and assessment spending. Potential members felt the energy and signed up to be part of the fight for kids.

Key Tactics:

Member Surveys—How much district-mandated testing does each grade do? How much time does it take from instruction? What would staff rather do than test? What would they rather do with \$100,000 dollars (or a similar amount)? What is left out when we test so much? HNEA surveyed more than 40% of the local.

1:1 Conversations along with the surveys—Discussing survey questions and moving staff to action. In Hazelwood, surveying and personal conversations were essential to bringing non-members into becoming full dues paying members.

District wide Assessment Landscape-Chart how many tests kids take per grade and how long it takes. The chart can be made by asking the district for the assessment list and adding in information from members on the time it takes.

Assessment Spending Landscape—The tool we use to investigate spending is the Sunshine Request, which obligates public institutions (such as school districts) to disclose specific spending upon request. Some districts charge for copies.

Happy organizing! Folks with questions can contact organizer Alice Floros at afloros@nea.org or 314-384-2579.

SAMPLE EDUCATOR SURVEY

How many minutes of learning time per month are lost because of unnecessary testing and data collection in your classroom? Please circle one.

0-30 minutes/month 30-45 minutes/month 45-60 minutes/month 60-90 minutes/month _____

If you could cut one assessment program, which would it be?

SRI SMI Running Records AIMSweb eEvaluate DRA USATestPrep

Which assessment, if any, do you find useful?

SMI SRI Running Records AIMSweb eEvaluate DRA USATestPrep

Instead of testing, the district should spend money on _____ to bolster student achievement.

More reading specialists More math specialists Smaller class sizes
Better classroom materials More building aides

Circle as many as apply: Because of testing, my students lose access to:

Library Enriching activities
Specialists Computer labs

What would you do if you spent less time testing?

Which of these changes by the district would positively impact your ability to serve your students?

Please rank the following issues in order of importance—1 being most important, 6 being least:

- Lower class size in my school ____
- Limit number of data meetings during planning time ____
- Decrease number of mandated assessments ____
- Include educators in the planning of staff meetings and professional development ____
- Increase amount of planning time during the school day ____
- Increase staff in buildings (assistant principals, teachers' assistants, building aides) ____

NOTE: This is using Missouri Open Records law. Laws in your state may vary.

Administrative Assistant to the Superintendent

Secretary to the Board of Education

Central Office Address

Town, MO, Zipcode

DATE

This is a request for records under the Missouri Sunshine Law, Chapter 610, Revised Statutes of Missouri.

I request that you make available to me the following records:

A list of all contracts and the amount paid to said companies that provide student testing programs to the School District, such as but not limited to, NAME OF PUBLISHING COMPANY (NAME OF PROGRAM) {i.E. Pearson (AimsWeb)} for the years 2013-2014, 2014-2015, and 2015-2016.

If portions of the requested records are closed, such as discussion of hiring, firing, disciplining or promoting specific employees and preparations pursuant to Section 610.021 (3, 9) RSMo, please segregate the closed portions and provide me with the rest of the records.

I request that the records responsive to my request be copied and sent to me through PREFERRED METHOD (school mail, USPS).

NAME

ADDRESS

EMAIL

PHONE NUMBER

District Testing Landscape Table

<u>Grade</u>	<u>Reading Tests</u>	<u>Math Tests</u>	<u>Science Tests</u>	<u>Other</u>	<u>Hours per month</u>	<u>Number of tests/ yr</u>
Kinder garten	Diagnostic Reading Assessment, 5 Aimsweb tests	4 AImsw eb tests			Big testing 3 times / year Loss of 8 hrs/yr	30
1 st grade	Diagnostic Reading Assessment, 5 Aimsweb tests	4 AImsw eb tests			Big testing 3 times / year --lost of 8 hrs/yr	30
2 nd grade	Diagnostic Reading Assessment, 5 Aimsweb tests	4 AImsw eb tests			Big testing 3 times / year --loss of 8 hrs/yr	30
3rd grade	eValuate (monthly), Scholastic Reading Inventory, Aimsweb	eValuate (monthly), Aimsweb Math			3 hours per month Loss of 27 hrs/yr	18
4 th grade	eValuate (monthly), Scholastic Reading Inventory, Aimsweb	eValuate (monthly), Aimsweb Math			3 hours per month --loss of 27 hrs/yr	18
5 th grade	eValuate (monthly), Scholastic Reading Inventory (3X year), Aimsweb (3X year)	eValuate (monthly), Aimsweb Math			3 hours per month -loss of 27 hrs/yr	18
6 th grade	eValuate (monthly), Scholastic Reading Inventory (3X year), Aimsweb (3X year)	eValuate (monthly), Aimsweb Math			3 hours per month Loss of 27 hrs/yr	18
7 th grade	eValuate (monthly), Scholastic Reading Inventory (3X year), Aimsweb (3X year)	eValuate (monthly), Aimsweb Math	USATest Prep Science 2X/year		3 hours per month Loss of 30 hrs/yr	20
8 th grade	eValuate (monthly), Scholastic Reading Inventory (3X year), Aimsweb (3X year)	eValuate (monthly), Aimsweb Math			3 hours per month Loss of 27 hrs/yr	18
9 th grade	SRI 2X/year,				3 hours of learning time lost	2
10 th grade	USA Test Prep English (4X year), SRI 2X/year,	USA Test Prep Algebra (4X year)			15 hours of learning time lost	10
11 th grade	SRI 2X/year		USA Test Prep Biology 4x yr		8 hours of learning time lost	6
12 th grade				USA Test Prep Gov 4x/year	4 hours of learning time lost	4

Sample District Interim Assessment Spending Table

To be filled out with information requests

Test	Publishing Company	Contract Duration	Cost	Details

Year to Year Costs if Multiple Companies and Tests

Year	All Companies	Total Expenditures
2013-2014 Total		
2014-2015 Total		
2015-2016 Total		

Building Map

Current Building Reps

Name	Position	Details	Assessment

■ Are the reps on the issue organizing committee? If not, who in the building is?

Number of members at recent board meetings or local committee meetings—

Principal notes

Building Culture Notes

PTA Notes—involved? uninformed?

Building Chart

Leadership Assessment Scale	Numbers
Leader with followers	1
Activist	2
Member	3
Non-member	4

*= member

+Include notes if anyone was a former member and reasons for dropping

+assess folks on the leadership scale so you have a sense of their worksite leadership.

Kindergarten
1 st
2 nd
3 rd
4 th
5 th
Special Areas teachers

Tips for writing a great letter:

- *Tell stories*—Share why you love your students, your colleagues and the school community.
- *Frame issues*—Think in terms of what is right for students.
- *Change Minds*--Remember that minds are often changed not because of facts, but because of building connections and relationships.

Dear School Board member,

I am writing you today on two urgent issues affecting our kids: experienced teachers and learning time.

Our kids are a brilliant and diverse student body. Tragically, the administration has chosen to invest money and student learning time in too many assessments. Teachers find one or two of the district's seven assessment forms useful, but estimate that kids can lose up to 25 percent of the school year in testing. Because of excessive district-mandated testing, our students often lose access to Social Studies content, enrichment, and computer time. Our district will be most successful when the district drastically reduces assessments and provides students with more time to learn.

Experienced teachers are one of the most important ingredients of student success. In each school, we are the people who know each child's name as well as their needs, and how to meet them. High quality, experienced teachers love what we do for our district's families.

Thank you for your commitment to our kids and community.

Sincerely,

Name

Address

If applicable: Position and Years in district

P.S. A response to this letter is requested.

Talking points

We win when we are united. Time and time again, when educators speak up about students' learning conditions, we win. Together with parents and the community, we can play an important role in ending the high-stakes use of test scores that harm students, educators, and schools—and siphon time away from learning

Membership is a commitment to fight for the schools our students deserve. We only get stronger the more we work together and with our community. Over use and misuse of testing robs our children the time they need to learn. As members, we are the front line in the fight for our kids' learning environment and for our working conditions.

Member voices are the ones that must say, “We can do better than this. The overuse and abuse of bubble tests are stealing time and resources from our children.”

Talking Point with Families/ Communities

Your children deserve a great education. As educators, we are concerned about over testing and want to partner with you to restore needed time for learning in the classroom.

Over testing takes away precious time that your children should be spending in the classroom on learning and discovery, (especially in science and social studies). Consider the consequences; is this the quality education that our students and your children deserve? What do you think will happen if it continues this way?

If the person has kids in her/his life—what is the impact of the testing on your student?

Is this really the education our kids deserve?

Approaching the community about testing

Sample Script

Please note: the time and money spent on testing depends on the district.

Teacher: Hi, my name is ___ and I'm a teacher out here today with Education Association. We're doing a quick survey to hear what parents and community think about the overuse of standardized testing.

HAND FLIER. I want to share this information sheet with you first.

Parent: Wow. I didn't know about all these tests. 90 minutes of test prep per month! My son is at East Middle and my oldest daughter is at East High. My son graduated from East High last year. This is crazy that my kids go through this.

Teacher: It is. And look how much money the district is spending on all this testing! I bet you can think of a way you'd spend \$225,000 per year to help your kids be successful. How would you spend it?

Parent: (Laughs) I'd buy new equipment for Science for East High. I'd get more AP classes so my kids can be ready for college.

MARK DOWN ANSWER ON SURVEY

Teacher: Do you think our district tests too much?

Parent: Well, yeah! MARK ANSWER ON SURVEY

Teacher: Okay. What is the impact of testing on the students in your life?

Parent: My son hates school. He is bored and says the he feels stupid all the time because of the test.

Teacher: : I understand. I'm really excited to hear about how you would support the science program and boost the number of AP classes. Those are the kinds of things that are needed for quality education for our students. And that's why as educators and parents and community, we must work together to fight for what students need most to learn and thrive. And it is not more relentless testing. May I get your contact information? I'd like to invite you to for future events.

Parent: Sure. (Signs info card).

Teacher: Great. Have a good day!

Tough Questions

Affirm, Answer, Redirect

Q: I don't want to cut all these tests! We need to check how our kids are doing.

Affirm: That's right. We do need to check our kids' progress. We do that through classroom instruction and yes, assessments.

Answer: As educators and those concerned about providing a quality education, we know the impact of over testing and how the use of flawed tests can prevent student success. That's why we are working to restore learning time by cutting excessive testing in the classroom.

Redirect: Students are experiencing massive amounts of stress and aren't able to focus on the joy of learning. They don't get enough time to learn because they have to spend so much time preparing for and taking standardized tests. Do you think kids should be spending 25 percent of their time doing standardized tests rather than learning during reading class?

Q: We can't do anything about this issue anyway. The district will do what it wants.

Affirm: I know how you feel. As one teacher, I often feel alone.

Answer: But if we work together, we can make a difference. When teachers banded together and raised our voices, we were able to reduce excessive testing by about 20 percent this spring for English and math classes. Teachers are confident that this leaves only the best tests.

Redirect: Educators and parents have come together in places like St. Paul, MN to ensure that students are not being forced take bad standardized tests. They are also putting smarter, more productive plans in place that benefit our students, and children like yours. We can do that here, too. Can we count on your support?

Q: This sounds interesting, but I'm too busy with work and getting my degree.

Affirm: I know how you feel. Life can be really busy.

Answer: By coming together, we are all doing what we can to give all of our kids the opportunity to learn and make every school great. I would love to keep you updated on what we are doing so you can participate when possible.

Redirect: Can I take your contact information? We need a lot of voices as we stand up for our kids.

Q: Testing has never been a problem for my kids. I don't think you want to talk with me.

Affirm: You are a parent and I do want to talk with you. Your voice matters.

Answer: Think about it. That's 25 percent of your child's time that could be spent learning about history, art, science, or how to collaborate on a group project.

Redirect: We are worried that your kids won't get all the enrichment and opportunities they deserve because of the excessive testing. What do you wish your school had to help your students thrive?