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Pop Quiz on Testing

By **Lisa Guisbond**

You can practically hear the collective relief as school testing season winds down across America. It's not just the sighs of millions of overtested and stressed-out children. Joining them are state officials, school administrators, teachers, and parents. All, for varying reasons, are no doubt happy to close the door on a particularly disastrous season that included public uproar over a confusing reading test question and a scoring fiasco on the Florida writing exam.

Before we put away the No. 2 pencils, though, how about sharpening them for one last exam? Why should our kids be the only ones to suffer the acute anxiety that comes from opening the test booklet to Page 1? Let's share their pain and take a test to see how well we've been paying attention and learning from our obsession with tests.

1. Why did Florida's state board of education call an emergency meeting to lower the passing score on its writing exam?

A) The percentage of 4th grade students with passing scores **plunged** from 81 percent last year to 27 percent this year, making it look as if most students went from good to horrible writers in one year.

B) The board realized student writing wasn't really any worse, but the new test-scoring guide was too harsh and penalized students for minor mistakes.

C) The sudden drop in scores called the state's entire testing system into question.

D) All of the above.

2. Why did New York eliminate the "Hare and the Pineapple" item when scoring the 8th grade reading test?

A) A student came home and told his mother about extremely confusing and incomprehensible questions regarding an absurd reading passage.

B) The author of the story adapted for the test item expressed his contempt for the way his writing was used to confuse and distress young test-takers. "This was done by somebody who was barely literate," Daniel Pinkwater **said** of the adapter.

C) Media attention to the item embarrassed both test-maker Pearson and state education officials.

D) The "Pineapple" item was only one of more than 20 mistakes on the tests.

E) All of the above.

3. Why have 525 Texas school boards, more than 1,400 New York principals, and more than 8,000 individuals across the nation endorsed anti-high-stakes-testing resolutions and statements?

A) The Texas board members believe "the overreliance on standardized, high-stakes testing ... is strangling our public schools."

B) The New York principals said: "Our students are more than the sum of their test scores. ... According to a nine-year **study** by the National Research Council, the past decade's emphasis on testing has yielded little learning progress, especially considering the cost to taxpayers."

C) School board members, principals, and many parents across the country recognize that testing mandates compel them to do things that undermine teaching and learning.

D) All of the above.

4. Who pays for and who profits from the testing explosion resulting from the No Child Left Behind Act and similar misguided education policies?

A) Taxpayers spend billions of dollars for ever more testing, money that could be used to improve school facilities, hire and train teachers, and staff school libraries.

B) Pearson, the company behind the twin fiascos in Florida and New York as well as years of other costly testing errors, saw its profits increase by 72 percent in 2011.

C) Veteran teachers with years of positive reviews by knowledgeable evaluators are being labeled ineffective and denied tenure or fired based on inaccurate and incomprehensible formulas using student test scores.

D) All of the above.

5. What can parents, teachers, administrators, and school board members do to change the costly and destructive path we are on?

A) Sign the **National Resolution on High Stakes Testing** and tell all your friends and relatives to do the same.

B) Get engaged with your local school system to review and reconsider the amount and uses of testing.

C) Write your members of Congress and tell them federal education policy needs to fundamentally change



course and regain a sane and reasonable approach to assessment and accountability.

D) All of the above.

[The correct answer to all of the questions is "All of the above."]

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