

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

# **The Impact of High-Stakes Tests on Student Academic Performance: An Analysis of NAEP Results in States With High-Stakes Tests and ACT, SAT, and AP Test Results in States With High School Graduation Exams**

by

**Audrey L. Amrein**

and

**David C. Berliner**

**Arizona State University**

**Education Policy Research Unit (EPRU)**  
Education Policy Studies Laboratory  
College of Education  
Division of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies  
Box 872411  
Arizona State University  
Tempe, AZ 85287-2411

**December 2002**

**EP  
PSL**

**EDUCATION POLICY STUDIES LABORATORY**  
Education Policy Research Unit

EP  
PSL-0211-126-EPRU  
<http://edpolicylab.org>

**The Impact of High-Stakes Tests on Student Academic Performance:  
An Analysis of NAEP Results in States with High-Stakes Tests  
and ACT, SAT, and AP Test Results in States  
with High School Graduation Exams**

Audrey L. Amrein and David C. Berliner

Arizona State University

**Executive Summary**

Based on data from 28 states, there is scant evidence to support the proposition that high-stakes tests--including high-stake high school graduation exams—increase student achievement. The effects of state mandated high-stakes tests on student achievement were established by evaluating student performance on tests that assess the same curriculum domains as are covered by a state’s own high-stakes tests. These other independent measures of student achievement included the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), American College Test (ACT), Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT), and Advanced Placement (AP) assessments.

State-by-state analyses of scores and participation rates for the NAEP, ACT, SAT, and AP (see appendix) reveal that after a state implements high-stakes tests, nothing much happens on other measures of the same domain. We found that after high-stakes were attached to tests, grade 4 math achievement decreased. Grade 8 math achievement slightly increased and grade 4 reading achievement stayed the same. The states that have used high-stakes tests, in some cases for more than the past decade, have continued to

perform much like the rest of the nation after writing high-stakes tests into their testing policies.

The study concludes from the data that the implementation of high school graduation exams results in a decrease in academic achievement. It was found that after high-stakes graduation exams were implemented, ACT, SAT, and AP scores declined. No comment is made here on the appropriateness of these tests as measures of the outcomes of schooling or as predictors of college performance. That is a separate issue. These tests do claim, however, to measure some of the same domain as do high school graduation examinations. Our analyses suggest that high-stakes tests may inhibit the academic achievement of students, not foster their academic growth, on these different and independent measures of student achievement.

Although test scores on state-administered tests usually increase after high-stakes testing policies are implemented, the evidence presented here suggests that students are learning only the content and item forms of the state-administered test. Training in taking state mandated high-stakes tests appear to work, that is, scores on the tests do go up. Such training, however, does not appear to have any meaningful carryover effect when assessment of student learning is made on the independent measures of achievement that we used.