



## GEORGIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

### **POSITION STATEMENT: The use of High Stakes Testing**

GASP Position- Adopted during Spring Conference -May 2003

In Georgia, the use of testing programs is currently mandated for monitoring student achievement and holding schools and students accountable. When single test scores carry heavy consequences for students or schools, these tests are referred to as "high stakes" tests. The current implementation of the Georgia Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT) would be considered to fall under the category of "high stakes testing."

This is a Georgia Association of School Psychologists (GASP) position statement on the use of high stakes testing in the public schools of Georgia. The current application of the CRCT results may lead to serious detrimental effects on students, schools, and school systems. Specifically, GASP opposes reliance on the results of the CRCT as the most heavily weighted determinant for making critical decisions about students and schools.

The concerns expressed by GASP and its members regarding high stakes assessments are as follows:

1. It is predicted that the current implementation of high stakes testing using the CRCT in Georgia will increase the number of students who are retained.

Current Georgia policy mandates, for example, that third grade students who score at Level 1 on the CRCT Reading Section be retained. The test results will be used as the sole determinant of grade retention, unless an appeal is made for reconsideration. In making a determination to override the test results, a committee of three (principal, parent, classroom teacher) must unanimously agree that, with remediation, the student will score at or above grade level upon being tested again. A review of the criteria required for reaching a unanimous decision to override the test results shows that it may be unlikely that this will occur frequently. Therefore, it appears that grade retention will generally be based on a single measure of performance, the CRCT. The determination of educational placement based on a single measure of performance is not a practice that is supported by educational research. As a result of the mandate to use a single measure for retention and promotion, it is predicted that many more students will be retained.



## GEORGIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

2. There are frequently long-term negative effects on students who are retained.

The ineffectiveness of grade retention as a common educational practice is indicated overwhelmingly by empirical research. For example, students who have been retained are much more likely to drop out of school. The most consistent finding from decades of educational research on grade retention clearly establishes a high correlation between

retention and dropout rate. Other negative effects of grade retention include, but are not limited to, increased display of high-risk behaviors such as cigarette use, alcohol use, drug abuse, and early onset of sexual activity. As adults, students who have been retained are more likely to be unemployed, living on public assistance, and/or incarcerated.

3. The current implementation of high stakes testing promotes decision-making that may be racially and socioeconomically biased.

A research review of student grade retention undertaken and published by the National Association of School Psychologists indicates that specific groups of children are more likely to be retained than others. These students include: males; African-Americans or Hispanics; and students who have a late birthday, demonstrate delays in development and/or attention problems, live in poverty, live in a single parent household or have parents with low educational attainment, or have changed schools frequently (NASP Position Statement on Student Grade Retention and Social Promotion, 2002).

According to G. Orfield, Co-Director of the Civil Rights Project at Harvard University, use of high stakes testing penalizes low income and ethnic minority students and is linked to high drop-out rates. Orfield indicates that Hispanic and African-American children are three to four times more likely to be retained than Caucasian students (The Impact of High Stakes Testing Policies on Minority and Disadvantaged Students, 2000).



## GEORGIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

4. Results of high stakes testing reflect extraneous variables not under the control of schools. Therefore, it is an unfair practice to financially penalize and reward schools based on the results of the CRCT.

Research has indicated that there is a relationship between schools' overall performance and the socioeconomic status of their student bodies (Fischer & Dougherty, 1999). Therefore, schools that are located in areas that have students with a high socioeconomic background should not be compared with schools that are located in areas of poverty. Orfield expresses concern that the use of high stakes testing can result in "the punishment of innocent victims of unequal education" (The Impact of High Stakes Testing Policies on Minority and Disadvantaged Students, 2000).

When a student or school is identified by the CRCT as low performing, the underlying causes should be addressed. These may include poverty, class size, lack of materials, need for additional resources, and training opportunities for teachers. By financially rewarding high SES schools, low SES schools will receive even less of the resources that are already unevenly distributed across the state to local school systems. This will inevitably lead to even greater disparities between schools.

5. The CRCT was developed specifically as a criterion referenced test meant to assess student academic progress within the Quality Core Curriculum. It was not developed for assessment of schools, and therefore, should not be used in a manner that has not been validated (The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing).

Experts consistently acknowledge that tests should be designed for the specific purpose that they are intended to measure and for the population that they will serve (National Research Council, 1999). The Standards for Educational and Psychological Testing is widely accepted as a reliable source for recommendation of best practice procedures in assessment. According to this document, when a test is designed or used to serve multiple

purposes, evidence of the test's technical quality should be provided for each purpose. The use of the CRCT results for the purpose of assessing schools and teachers has not been shown to be a valid use of this instrument. Therefore, its use for this purpose is inappropriate.



## GEORGIA ASSOCIATION OF SCHOOL PSYCHOLOGISTS

In summary, it is the position of the Georgia Association of School Psychologists that well reasoned and grade appropriate curricular expectations may be assessed by test instruments that are developed for that specific purpose. When used appropriately, testing programs such as the CRCT may be a means of fostering growth toward high expectations and improving curriculum. Standards-based tests may be effectively used as global indicators of student progress and to identify areas of strength, as well as areas in need of additional resources. However, it is the position of the Georgia Association of School Psychologists that the use of high stakes testing in the manner that is currently being mandated within the State of Georgia may have long-term negative consequences for students, as well as for schools and teachers. The Georgia Association of School Psychologists does not support the use of high stakes testing to determine educational placement or eligibility for individual children, or to identify teachers, schools, or school districts for the purpose of imposing sanctions or granting rewards.

The position of the Georgia Association of School Psychologists is consistent with the positions expressed by such respected organizations as the American Educational Research Association (2000) and the National Association of School Psychologists (2002). Specifically, the Georgia Association of School Psychologists urges that the impact of high stakes testing be closely examined. A careful examination of the best measures and methods of determining student and overall school and system progress toward curricular goals and standards is needed. This review should be undertaken by a multidisciplinary team of educational professionals to ensure the appropriate use of assessment instruments, and protect the children and schools of Georgia from unnecessary and unwarranted negative outcomes.

The Georgia Association of School Psychologists (GASP) is a professional organization representing approximately 600 members who are school psychologists in the State of Georgia. The mission of GASP is to promote and advocate for the mental health and educational development of Georgia's children and youth; to support families, educational systems and communities; and to advance the interests of the profession of school psychology. GASP supports public policies that are educationally equitable, empirically sound, and are likely to increase positive educational outcomes.

Through their training and experience in education and psychology, school psychologists are in a unique position to share their expertise in educational measurement, variables crucial for students' academic success, and the impact of high stakes testing decisions on educational systems and student outcomes. It is, therefore, the purpose of this paper to provide educational stake holders in Georgia (school administrators, legislators, policy makers, parents, teachers, and students) with an understanding of the implications of the current student accountability system and to offer appropriate and educationally sound recommendations