

CARE-ED

California Alliance of Researchers for Equity in Education

ENDING HIGH-STAKES STANDARDIZED TESTING IN TEACHER EDUCATION

February 6, 2021

Dear California Commission on Teacher Credentialing:

In May 2020, to address the impact of the pandemic on teacher education, the state of California temporarily [waived or suspended](#) high-stakes standardized testing in teacher education, namely, the entrance or eligibility exams of CBEST, CSET, and RICA. As was and is happening in [states across the country](#), California allowed for alternative means to demonstrate eligibility and/or preparedness, granting flexibility to programs and candidates regarding not only admissions but also supervised fieldwork and summative performance assessments. Research supports such flexibility, now and well beyond the pandemic. ***Therefore, we urge not merely a continuance of previous waivers and suspensions, but an immediate and permanent end to high-stakes standardized-testing mandates in teacher education.*** We offer research findings in the following areas to support our request.

First, as we described in our 2016 brief, [Common Core State Standards Assessments in California](#), ***problems abound with high-stakes standardized testing in general***, particularly regarding validity, reliability, fairness, and bias. We argued that such assessments should not be administered, much less be the basis for high-stakes decision making at the K-12 level. Our brief focused on the CAASPP, but [ample research exists on the problems with a range of such tests](#), including those used in university admissions. Recently, the Alameda Superior Court barred the University of California from accepting SAT and ACT scores in the admissions process, arguing that “Nondisabled, economically advantaged, and white test-takers have an [inherent advantage](#) in the testing process.” The push to end the use of standardized tests in universities admissions has become a [worldwide movement](#).

Second, ***similar problems plague high-stakes standardized testing in teacher education***. In our 2019 brief, [Barriers to Diversity and Justice in the California Teacher Pipeline](#), we expanded our analysis to the eligibility exams used for teacher preparation and certification, arguing that

Such tests have not been proven by research to produce a higher quality teaching force; they are not valid and reliable in predicting teacher quality; but they do disproportionately filter out students of color because of the racial gap in scores between white students and students of color in general. This gap is not surprising, given the decades of research on cultural and racial

bias (i.e., Eurocentrism and white normativity) in standardized testing. And, while teachers of color are needed in all fields and grade levels, they will be in particular demand as more high schools across California require Ethnic Studies coursework, given that teachers of color bring life experiences that support effective Ethnic Studies pedagogy.

Several studies are illustrative of how eligibility testing does not raise teacher quality or student achievement, but does disproportionately hinder candidates of color, which in turn can negatively impact student learning. For example, Angrist and Guryan¹ reviewed extensive national data from the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS) and found no evidence that more teacher-candidate testing increased teacher quality but did find that the testing reduced the number of new Latinx teachers, explaining that “testing has acted more as a barrier to entry, than a quality screen.” Buddin and Zamarro² examined correlations in elementary education and found that “teacher licensure scores have little if any effect on classroom student achievement.” Clotfelter, Ladd, and Vigdor³ analyzed a large data set gathered over 10 years in North Carolina and found no relationship between teachers’ score on the licensure exam and student achievement gains in reading, although there was a correlation between high math scores in licensure exams and math achievement, suggesting that candidates who were confident and strong in math were better at teaching math.

Goldhaber and Hansen⁴ analyzed extensive data from the PRAXIS licensure tests and concluded that increased testing does not equate to higher student achievement. They argued that “licensure tests provide only limited evidence of teacher effectiveness, which varies across demographic groups, and that enforcing strict cutoffs has the potential to both adversely affect minority student outcomes and decrease workforce diversity.” They added, “The disparate impact of teacher testing has in fact been the focus of court challenges in Alabama, California, South Carolina, and Texas, where plaintiffs have sued school districts and states based on claims of discriminatory testing practices. Only in Alabama did the court rule in favor of the teachers, but these court challenges clearly suggest that state education leaders need to take the impact that these tests have on minority candidates seriously and offer evidence supporting a valid relationship between teacher testing and student outcomes. Clearly, teacher testing is relevant to arguments about the diversity of the teacher workforce, but testing policies may also influence the learning of minority students; the argument for recruiting a diverse teacher workforce rests, in part, on positive gains in student achievement due to matching students with teachers of a similar racial or ethnic background.”

Le and Buddin⁵ examined technical reports and meeting records and found no empirical evidence of things like item difficulty and item discrimination for the CBEST, CSET, and RICA. The authors point out that other studies have found that cut scores can vary depending on who is on the standard-setting panel or how the standard-setting exercise is framed, which is problematic, given that, on the RICA and CBEST, white candidates pass at higher rates than candidates of color. Stankous⁶ documented the difficulty of passing the CSET, even for candidates who are strong in the disciplines such as mathematics. Kohli⁷ documented how candidates of color experienced racial bias in the CSET content. CARE-ED’s 2019 brief describes a number of other concerns with the testing industry, including the high financial cost to students and the opportunities for profiteering by the corporate sector.

Hawai'i and Illinois recently removed basic-skills testing mandates while other states, including Indiana and New York, have begun reviewing their requirements. California should seize this opportunity to lead the nation in permanently ending the use of high-stakes standardized tests in teacher education.

In place of such tests, we reiterate the recommendations from our 2019 brief to

- **“Provide models for how institutions are effectively using a variety of more authentic criteria (including previous university coursework, supervisor evaluations of work in schools and/or community settings, and experience addressing issues of diversity and justice) to determine eligibility for program entrance and completion;”** and
- **“Support institutions in developing and implementing their own criteria and process for ensuring that diversity and justice are at the heart of admissions.”**

We, a statewide alliance of educational scholars and researchers that centers on equity, democracy, and justice, stand ready to work collectively with you as we reframe the conversation about assessments in teacher education and move policy and practice in these directions.

Endnotes:

¹ Angrist, J. D., & Guryan, J. (2008). Does teacher testing raise teacher quality? Evidence from state certification requirements. *Economics of Education Review*, 27(5), 483-503.

² Buddin, R., & Zamarro, G. (2009). Teacher qualifications and student achievement in urban elementary schools. *Journal of Urban Economics* 66, 103-115.

³ Clotfelter, C., Ladd, H., & Vigdor, J. (2007). *How and why do teacher credentials matter for student achievement?* NBER Working Paper 12828.

⁴ Goldhaber, D., & Hansen, M. (2010). Race, gender, and teacher testing: How informative a tool is teacher licensure testing?. *American Educational Research Journal*, 47(1), 218-251.

⁵ Le, V. N., & Buddin, R. (2005). *Examining the validity evidence for California's teacher licensure exams*. Rand Education Working Paper Series.

⁶ Stankous, N. V. (2011). Challenges of examinations for mathematics teachers in California. *Didactics of Mathematics: Problems and Investigations* 35, 114-121.

⁷ Kohli, R. (2014). Unpacking internalized racism: teachers of color striving for racially just classrooms. *Race Ethnicity & Education*, 17(3), 367-387.

CARE-ED: California Alliance of Researchers for Equity in Education. <https://www.care-ed.org/>

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