

Take a Stand!

CHAPTER 15: UNDERSTANDING AND USING STANDARDIZED TESTS

T A K E A S T A N D !

Healing the Patient: Using the Medical Model to Guide Educational Accountability

The contention that educators should be held accountable for their efforts is accepted by almost everybody, including educators. Indeed, every person should be accountable in some fashion to others. What is, and should be, vigorously debated is the way in which accountability is defined and practiced. We believe that the accountability systems of many states are less effective than they could be because their primary focus is on identifying and punishing substandard performance rather than identifying and remediating the causes of those weaknesses.

We agree with measurement expert Gregory Cizek, who argues that if high-stakes programs are to be more widely embraced by educators, students, and parents, they should mimic the assessment approach used by physicians in their practices. Medical tests tend to be diagnostic in nature because of the detailed level at which they report results. A typical analysis of a blood sample, for example, provides information on the levels of over 20 elements (e.g., blood sugar, sodium, potassium, calcium, protein, HDL cholesterol, LDL cholesterol, and triglyceride). Abnormal results are then followed by specific recommendations for treatment. The patient isn't accused of being inferior and charged twice the doctor's normal fee as a penalty for having "failing" test scores.

Consequently, a reasonable stand for teachers to take regarding high-stakes testing programs is that they should be constructed to provide detailed information about students'

strengths and weaknesses, and these results should serve as a basis for additional instruction. In addition, professional development workshops and seminars should be provided, focusing on how teachers can help students learn the knowledge and skills that are assessed.

Would you agree with using a medical model for high-stakes testing? What can you do in your own school to promote this view of testing?

Additional Take a Stand! Questions:

1. What do you think teacher accountability should look like?
2. Why are standardized test scores commonly used for teacher accountability?
3. Do you agree with the consequences that teachers and school face if they perform poorly on current measures of accountability?

Related Web Resources:

<http://www.edweek.org/context/topics/issuespage.cfm?id=49>

This link contains an Education Week article on the topic of accountability. Links to other related articles are also provided.

http://www.education-consumers.com/articles/value_added_assessment.shtm

This link contains an article on value-added assessment which is presented as an alternative approach for teacher accountability.

<http://www.udel.edu/bateman/acei/onstandard.htm#question>

This link contains a position statement on standardized testing from the Association for Childhood Education International.