

By

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My name is James Nehring and I serve as associate professor of education at the University of Massachusetts Lowell. I am here to speak in support of House Bill 497—which bans the use of a state standardized test as a graduation requirement-- and House Bill 340—which creates a task force to invent a better system.

Used appropriately, standardized tests provide diagnostic information helpful to teachers. There is nothing wrong with tests and testing. There is, however, something terribly wrong with an obsessive reliance on tests, and particularly a single test, to determine such important matters as high school graduation. For fifteen years, the three most prominent professional societies in education—the educational equivalent of the American Medical Association—have maintained a public statement condemning the use of testing for high stakes decisions.<sup>(1)</sup> This means that high stakes testing is malpractice by the standards of the American Educational Research Association, the American Psychological Association, and the National Council on Measurement in Education. As long as you, as elected public officials fail to act, you are endorsing educational malpractice.

I am currently leading an international research study funded by the Fulbright program of the United States Department of State. We are studying the mismatch between the narrow and shallow skills that schools are required to teach under a high stakes testing regime and the broad and deep skills—sometimes called 21<sup>st</sup> century skills—that are essential to work, civic engagement, and personal growth. What is clear is that the use of high stakes exams impedes student learning in essential, 21<sup>st</sup> century skills.<sup>(2)</sup>

There are better assessment instruments already in use by some schools in the Commonwealth and in other jurisdictions, based on a mix of assessments including student portfolios and juried student exhibitions that are assessed according to public standards and vetted through peer review.

Testing in the Commonwealth has become a kind of policy addiction and just like addiction treatment, we need to go cold turkey to break the habit and adopt new healthy habits.

1. "Position Statement on High Stakes Testing" available at [www.aera.net](http://www.aera.net)

2. Nehring, J. and Szczesiul, S. (2015). Redefining high performance in Northern Ireland: Deeper learning and twenty-first century skills meet high stakes accountability. *Journal of Educational Change*, 28 May, online (print edition forthcoming). DOI 10.1007/s10833-015-9250-8