Thank you for your request to our REL Reference Desk regarding evidence-based information about the impact of high stakes testing on rural school districts. Ask A REL is a collaborative reference desk service provided by the ten regional educational laboratories (REL) that, by design, functions much in the same way as a technical reference library. It provides references, referrals, and brief responses in the form of citations on research based education questions.

The information below represents the most rigorous research available. Researchers consider the type of methodology and give priority to research reports that employ well described and thorough methods. The resources were also selected based on the date of the publication with a preference for research from the last ten years. Additional criteria for inclusion include the source and funder of the resource.

Question: *What is the impact of high stakes testing on rural school districts?*

Search Process

Key words and search strings used in the search: *high stakes testing* AND *rural school districts, testing, rural schools*

Search databases and websites:

1. ERIC, http://www.eric.ed.gov/
2. JSTOR, http://www.jstor.org/action/showAdvancedSearch
3. Google Scholar, www.google.com/scholar
4. Institute of Education Sciences (IES) Resources, http://ies.ed.gov
5. What Works Clearinghouse, http://ies.ed.gov/ncee/wwc/

Sample Citations Retrieved:

Amrein, A. L. & Berliner, D. C. (2002). High-stakes testing and student learning. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 10*(18). Retrieved from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v10n18/

Abstract/Summary: Studied 18 states with high-stakes testing to see if their programs were affecting student learning, analyzing results from additional tests covering some of the same domain as each state's own test. Findings suggest that in all but one case, student learning is indeterminate, remains at the same level, or actually decreases with the implementation of high-stakes testing.

Beck, F. D. & Shoffstall, G. W. (2005). How do rural schools fare under high stakes testing regime? *Journal of Research in Rural Education, 20*(14), 1-12. Retrieved from http://www.jrre.psu.edu/articles/20-14.pdf

Abstract/Summary: Analyses of data from the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) show how strongly associated the socioeconomic characteristics of schools are with school outcomes. Factors such as the percentage of students who are poor, percentage black, and the property values within a district explain over 70% of the variance in school outcomes. However, the state has created a high-stakes designation system, using yearly test scores as a snapshot of school performance. Schools would be sanctioned or rewarded more on levels of poverty and racial characteristics than on gain scores. We extend this research by linking county level data to the 2000 ISAT data for Illinois' public schools. We examine the extent to which rurality matters for school outcomes and the extent to which the Illinois' school designation system unfairly targets poor rural schools. We find that rural schools in Illinois perform better than their suburban or urban counterparts on the state's standardized test. Despite this, the high stakes test and designation system being considered by the state will unfairly benefit suburban schools. (Contains 6 Tables and 1 Figure.)

Egley, R. J. & Jones, B. D. (2004). Rural elementary administrators views of high-stakes testing. *Rural Educator*, *26*(1), 30-39. Retrieved from http://www.ruraleducator.net/archive/26-1/26-1_Egley.pdf

Abstract/Summary: This study examines how rural elementary school administrators perceive the effects of high-stakes testing in comparison to suburban and urban elementary administrators. High-stakes testing had a greater impact, both positively and negatively, on rural administrators than on their counterparts in suburban and urban schools. Specifically, the positive effects were that rural administrators were more motivated by the testing program to do a better job, found the test results more useful in assessing teachers, and found the test results more useful in meeting the academic needs of students. The negative effects were that rural administrators felt more pressure than urban administrators to improve test scores and found their school rating to more negatively affect their ability to attract high quality teachers than administrators in suburban schools. (Contains 4 tables.)

Hodges, P. V. (2002). High stakes testing and its implications on rural schools. *Rural Educator*, *24*(2), 3-7.

Abstract/Summary: The movement to standardization and high-stakes testing has been driven by ideological and political concerns and has adversely affected teaching/learning, democratic discourse, and educational equity. Rural schools are hit harder because of geographic isolation

and insufficient staff and resources. Testing used for purposes other than measuring student gains and diagnosing their needs to improve instruction must stop.

Wright, W. E. & Chio, D. (2006). The impact of language and high-stakes testing policies on elementary school English language learners in Arizona. *Education Policy Analysis Archives, 14(*13), 1-75. Retrieved from http://epaa.asu.edu/epaa/v14n13/

Abstract/Summary: This article reports the results of a survey of third-grade teachers of English Language Learners (ELLs) in Arizona regarding school language and accountability policies--Proposition 203, which restricts bilingual education and mandates sheltered English Immersion; the federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB); and Arizona LEARNS, the state's high-stakes testing and accountability program. The instrument, consisting of 126 survey questions plus open-ended interview question, was designed to obtain teacher's views, to ascertain the impact of these polices, and to explore their effectiveness in improving the education of ELL students. The survey was administered via telephone to 40 teacher participants from different urban, rural and reservation schools across the state. Each participant represents the elementary school in their respective school district which has the largest population of ELL students. Analyses of both quantitative and qualitative data reveal that these policies have mostly resulted in confusion in schools throughout the state over what is and is not allowed, and what constitutes quality instruction for ELLs, that there is little evidence that such policies have led to improvements in the education of ELL students, and that these policies may be causing more harm than good. Specifically, teachers report they have been given little to no guidance over what constitutes sheltered English immersion, and provide evidence that most ELL students in their schools are receiving mainstream sink-or-swim instruction. In terms of accountability, while the overwhelming majority of teachers support the general principle, they believe that high-stakes tests are inappropriate for ELLs and participants provided evidence that the focus on testing is leading to instruction practices for ELLs which fail to meet their unique linguistic and academic needs. The article concludes with suggestions for needed changes to improve the quality of education for ELLs in Arizona. (Contains 2 figures, 16 tables, 13 footnotes, a copy of the telephone survey used in the study.)

Referrals

Organization:

- National Rural Education Association: http://www.nrea.net/

Institute of Education Sciences Resources (IES):
Publication search engine available at: http://ies.ed.gov/pubsearch/

Other Federally Funded Resources:

- National Research Center on Rural Education Support: http://www.nrcres.org/
- National Assessment of Educational Progress: The Nation's Report Card: http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/
- Rural Schools Data: http://nces.ed.gov/surveys/ruraled/
- Mid Continent Research for Education Laboratory: http://www.mcrel.org/

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