

## Testing the Limits: How High-Stakes Testing Puts Young Children At Risk

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## What Policymakers Want to Know Today

**“Are Children Learning?”**

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**“Are public funds being used wisely?”**

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## High-Stakes or High Standards?

*“If you’re against high-stakes testing, it’s like being soft on crime. People are afraid of appearing soft on standards.”*

—NY Assemblyman Ted Sanders  
(quoted in the New York Times, 6/15/05)

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## Problems With The NRS

- Construct underrepresentation and construct-irrelevant variance
- Weak validity data
- Measurement-Driven Instruction
- Inadequate provision for children from non-English speaking homes or those who are disabled

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## The NRS Experience (cont.)

- One-quarter of the testers said that test procedures were unnatural
- Half of the teacher-testers reported children not doing as well as expected

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## GAO Report (May 2005) **Validity**

*“The Head Start Bureau has not shown that the NRS...results are valid measures of the learning that takes place [in Head Start].”*

**GAO Report (May 2005)  
Measurement-Driven  
Instruction**

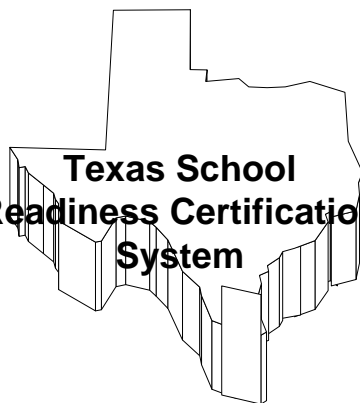
*“... at least 18% of grantees changed instruction during the first year to emphasize areas covered in the NRS.”*



**Florida Voluntary  
Prekindergarten  
Education Program**

**Enacted  
January 2, 2005**

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**Texas School  
Readiness Certification  
System**

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**The Texas School Readiness  
Certification System - 1**

Kindergartners are directly tested with a 10-minute language and literacy “screener” and teachers complete a social skills inventory for each child.

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**The Texas School Readiness  
Certification System - 2**

Children’s scores are linked to their preschools, and if 80% of the children pass, the preschool is awarded a “readiness certification”.

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**Preschool Accountability and  
Kindergarten Testing:  
Threats to Validity**

- Fairness of the sample
- Impact of “summer loss”
- Ignoring the baseline

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**The best way to evaluate a child's performance is to study performance, not something else.**

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**The best way to improve a child's performance is to *teach* the child, not test the child.**

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**What Pre-K Accountability Can Teach Us About High-Stakes Tests (and NCLB)**

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**1. High-stakes tests bring out the worst in everyone.**

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**2. Tests used for high-stakes change what is taught.**

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**3. High-stakes tests are typically misleading in content and conclusions.**

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**4. Results from high-stakes tests should not be used as proxies or substitutes for teacher quality and child learning.**

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**Understanding  
the child within  
context is key to  
understanding the  
child**

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