High Stakes Assessment

In education you often hear a lot of pros and cons about whether or not high stakes testing is beneficial to students, parent, teachers, and/or schools. This is so debatable because these high stakes tests in Indiana determine many things such as moving on to the next grade and also graduating high school. The most familiar high stakes testing in Indiana is the standardized tests called the ISTEP (Indiana Standardized Test of Educational Progress). It is a high stakes test that assesses students in grades 3 through 10.

High stakes testing is usually based on multiple choice and short answer questions that are not always going to meet each student’s learning needs. Some students need to be assessed differently because there are more ways of learning than the types that are on the test. It is unfair for a student to be assessed based on questions that do not show whether or not that the student obtained the information. There are other ways to test rather than only high stakes testing that can provide the student with the opportunity to express his or her own learning experience. For example, a reflection test could allow the student to apply and explained what they learned through their own writing.

There is also a lot of pressure from the high stakes test for the classroom teacher. The government takes a look at the school’s test scores as well as the principal taking a look at the
teacher’s single classroom scores. It is not fair to teachers to be responsible of what previous teachers have and have not taught them in the classroom. It is also palpable that teachers strive to teach “only to the test.” This means that teachers are only teaching the material that they know will be on the test. It also is very time consuming for tests like the ISTEP because it takes time trying to teach students how to take tests properly. This is causing teachers to only focus on information that is only going to be on the test rather than expanding more teachable moments. This also led to a decrease in a lot of lesson plans. It makes the teacher much like a robot, only teaching the information that is told to teach. There are a lot of important learning outcomes that are usually taught outside of the standardized tests.

High stakes testing also imposes a lot of stress on the test taker. According to that day, the test taker may do sufficiently good or bad depending on the environment they are in. If the student is having a horrible day, then the students test scores are most likely not going to be as high as they should be. A lot of students feel a lot of stress because of the high stakes testing. Test anxiety and nervousness are part of a large rate from students that affect test scores. Students are so worried about passing or failing the test, that they have a hard time concentrating. At the high school level, the United States may see a higher dropout rate because of these tests. Test takers are so threatened that they will not be able to graduate and complete the test, so they drop out. This leads students to be less motivated to actually take the test, because they do not see the point in taking it if they are just going to fail.

This high stakes testing can be the assessments that decide the future of a student. I believe that high stakes testing should not be based solely on one type of test. It is not accurate to base scores on one day of testing. It should be based on several assessments that show different learning styles that will help relieve pressure off of teachers and students.