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STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENTS: THE AFFECTS  
ON TEACHERS IN A SOUTH JERSEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL

by  
Ashley P. Root

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the  
Master of Science in Teaching Degree  
of  
The Graduate School  
at  
Rowan University  
June 30, 2005

Approved by \_\_\_\_\_  
Dr. Susan Browne

Date Approved 06.30.05  
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## ABSTRACT

Ashley P. Root  
STANDARDIZED EDUCATIONAL ASSESSMENTS: THE AFFECTS  
ON TEACHERS IN A SOUTH JERSEY ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
2004/05

Dr. Susan Browne  
Master of Science in Teaching

The purpose of this study is to explore how standardized testing affects teaching methods. The major aspects of this qualitative study focus around two questions: How do the pressures and incentives inflicted by standardized achievement tests effect or change teacher instruction? The site for the research is in an elementary school in Gloucester Township, New Jersey. The population for this study consists of teachers ranging from kindergarten teachers to fifth grade teachers. My research is based on interpretation of data gathered by investigation and examination. I used observations, analysis of materials, survey responses, and questionnaires as the basis for my research; therefore, I feel that my research is best described as qualitative based. In conclusion to my study, I found that pressures do exist which persuade teachers to “teach to the test” using valuable academic learning time to prepare students for standardized achievement tests.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my mom and dad, thank you for your support over the last five years. I appreciate your understanding and helpfulness that you provided me in the past and present. To my husband, thank you so much for staying up with me all of those long nights. Your support means the world to me. To my cooperating teachers, thank you for allowing me to implement my study and collect data in your classrooms and school. To Dr. Browne, thank you for your guidance and support through this entire process. Without your encouraging words, I do not think I would have made it through.

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CHAPTER I  
THESIS INTRODUCTION

My cooperating teacher took control of the class as the students took their seats in Advisory (homeroom). It was Monday morning and I could tell that the students were not ready for the information they were about to receive. \*Mrs. Apple explained to the class, "Alright, today is Monday and we are starting a new tradition on Monday mornings in Advisory. Every Monday is now going to be Math Monday and each of you will complete a worksheet to prepare you all for the GEPAs." The students complained, but Mrs. Apple stressed the importance of the activity. "This test is something that we have to practice for. The scores that you each obtain will affect your futures", continued Mrs. Apple. The chatter that once existed in the classroom was eliminated, as the students immediately focused on the assignment with great apprehension.

\*Throughout this study pseudonyms are used for students and teachers that participated.

*What is she saying? I can't believe that one full hour of class time is going to be used to prepare the students for the standardized test that they are required to take in a few months. These skills should be covered during their regular math classes. Instead, they are wasting valuable teaching time to "teach to the test". The children are in shock. I can see it in their faces and when she spoke about the affects on their futures, each and every student's eyes got wider and wider. This is horrible. Why are they using the time that is allotted for teaching life skills to prepare the students for the upcoming*



*standardized test? Is this a school wide activity or is it just the eighth grade? Was this an idea set forth by the principal or does the district control this activity? Who is pressuring the teachers to do this?*

### General Background Information

According to Jean Baresic and David Gilman (2001) standardized tests vary from state to state but are widely used across the United States to measure student performance and academic skills. These tests influence the matriculation from grade to grade, the graduation from high school, and enrollment into college. Standardized tests hold much weight in society; therefore, pressure to achieve high is put on individuals such as states, districts, administrators, principals, teachers, and students. The pressure controls the everyday schedule of each classroom in the United States as teachers begin to use valuable learning time to teach students to prepare for standardized tests. As stated by Baresic and Gilman, Montey Neill, the director of the National Center for Fair and Open Testing, explains that important academic time is being devoted to preparing students for standardized tests.

### Overview of Related Research

As stated by Bruce Bowers (1989), author of “Alternatives to Standardized Educational Assessment”, Glen Robinson and James Clever state that standardized tests are used as a function in terms of comparative scores to aid placement decisions, to indicate a student’s strengths and weaknesses, and to assess the accountability of using student scores to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers, schools, and even entire districts (Bowers, 1989).

Standardized test scores inflict pressure on educators by threatening job security and professional contentment (Berube, 2004). According to Ron Brandt (1997) students are also inflicted with pressure, as their futures depend on the test scores that they receive. Incentives pertaining to the scores of students on standardized tests are existent in the educational world today (Barbara Gleason, 2000). Teachers and educators are being bribed with money and job security to those whose students achieve high on standardized tests.

All of the pressures and incentives have changed the way instructional time is engaged in the process within the classroom. Teachers are now implementing the term “Teaching to the Test”. According to Matthew Gandal and Jennifer Vranek (2001), it can be gathered that teachers feel pressured to “teach to the test” rather than teaching the “rigorous curriculum”. With this statement in consideration, are students receiving the best education possible or are educators too worried about test scores that students are slipping through the cracks?

#### Importance of Study/Potential Audiences

This study is important, as the topic of standardized testing affects every child’s life at a certain point. Standardized tests hold significant weight in society and control how or whether students progress educationally. According to Bill Metzker (2003) in “Time and Learning” in ERIC Digest, time during a school day can be looked upon as an inverted pyramid. He explained that academic learning time or the period during which instructional activity is taking place is at the bottom portion of the inverted pyramid. The bottom is the narrowest portion of the pyramid; therefore, Metzker is stating that students spend the least amount of time engaging in academic learning during each school day.

“Teaching to the test” is a component that may add significance to this description. A teacher using valuable academic time on non-instructional activities creates a significant problem in the school systems of the United States.

This study may be of value to many different audiences. Teachers, parents, administrators, and state officials are potential audiences that may take interest to this study. Employment relations, concern for a child’s future, and school expectations may be reasons to show interest in this study regarding standardized testing.

#### Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to explore the reasons pressures and incentives inflicted by standardized testing affect teaching methods. The site for the research is in an elementary school in Gloucester Township, New Jersey. All teachers were provided with the opportunity to participate anonymously.

#### Research Questions

This study is guided by one central question as a main idea with sub-topics that are relation to. How do the pressures and incentives inflicted by standardized achievement tests affect or change teacher instruction?

#### Limitations

Throughout this study, I found a few limitations that I did not foresee from the start. My data collection was limited to a five-week period creating a short window of time to collect and observe all data needed. The setting in which I was assigned to do my student teaching became the setting for my research. I was able to conduct almost all research that I had planned, but ran into some difficulty. Although, I was given administrative permission to conduct whatever type of research that I needed, I was

unable to perform the teacher interviews. As the five-week window progressed, I was beginning to discuss possible employment with the administration. I felt that since I was highly considering becoming part of the faculty, it was in my best interest to eliminate the teacher interviews. By eliminating the interviews I was reducing any circumstance of the collection of data not remaining anonymous. I feel that elimination of the teacher interviews was the most serious limitation I faced.

### Story of the Question

Growing up in the public school system, the one factor I absolutely despised was standardized tests. I am not an efficient test taker and always felt the pressure to do well. I was successful in school and only ever got below a B once in my entire career. But when it came to standardized tests, my scores were horrible. After taking the SATs numerous times and receiving almost the same score each time, I gave up. I knew I had the grades to be accepted into college, but my scores were low. I came to realization that I may not get accepted into the college or program of my choice because of my scores on one test. Why do these tests hold so much weight and who creates the pressure that is inflicted by them?

I chose to study this portion of the educational society, as this topic has always been something that has been of interest to me. Throughout my college years, taking courses involving assessment methods, I was able to come to the conclusion that the aspects of standardized testing were something that I wanted to research further.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### Introduction

According to W. James Popham (1999), a standardized test can be described as any examination or assessment that is administered and scored in a predetermined and standard manner. Bruce C. Bowers (1989), author of “Alternatives to Standardized Educational Assessment”, in relation to usage, quotes Glen Robinson and James Claver as saying...

Standardized testing is currently used to fulfill the administrative function of providing comparative scores for individual students so that placement decisions can be made; the guidance function of indicating a student's strengths and weaknesses so that he or she may make appropriate decisions regarding a future course of study; and, more recently, the accountability function of using student scores to assess the effectiveness of teachers, schools, and even entire districts.

In this chapter, I will provide a review of the literature previously completed in regards to my central question on standardized tests. The pressures and incentives in correlation to standardized tests that teachers face from government, state, and districts will be outlined in the first section of this chapter. The affects and changes that take place because of these pressures and incentives will be thoroughly discussed in the second section of this chapter. The third section will discuss theory as to whether or

not standardized tests should be used to measure the effectiveness of the educational system.

### Pressures and Incentives Enforced by Standardized Testing

Berube (2004), Assistant Professor of Education at Wagner College, reflects upon the push for high stakes testing and standardized tests by explaining that this idea grew out of the Standards-Based Reform Movement that took place in 1990's. She quotes L.M. Abrams and G.F. Madaus as stating that this type of testing gave rise to accountability systems that are made up of four components: (1) content standards, (2) tests designed to measure achievement of the content standards, (3) performance targets, and (4) incentives, such as awarding diplomas upon passing the test. Berube feels that the public relies on this system of testing because society views tests as symbols of order control, and attainment, as well as, providing scores that portray conclusive proof that achievement is attained. These ideologies hold standardized tests high and inflict pressure to all related to succeed.

“Educators are experiencing almost relentless pressure to show their effectiveness. Unfortunately, the chief indicator by which most communities judge a school staff's success is student performance on standardized achievement tests” (Popham, 1999, p. 1) He explains in “Why Standardized Tests Don't Measure Educational Quality”, that society views a school with high standardized test scores as having a staff that is effective and a school with low standardized test scores is viewed as having an ineffective staff. This puts pressure on the staff, as students' standardized test scores remain to be the most important and relied upon factor in evaluating a school.

Student standardized test scores inflict pressure on educators by threatening job security and professional contentment (Berube, 2004). How can a school district fire a teacher because his or her student did not do well on a standardized test? What law regulates this practice? These questions are aspects that I want to involve myself with during my study.

Brandt (1997) stresses that pressure regarding student achievement on standardized tests is not only put on the teachers and educational officers, but also the students, themselves. He asks the question, “tests are only an indicator of performance, so why do they hold more weight than the performance, itself?”(p. 1) Vito Perrone (2003) touches upon this aspect of pressure on the student body. He states that tests are no longer used solely for comparative reasons. The scores now determine placement in gifted and talented classes, eligibility for enrichment programs or special tutoring, and student academic level. Standardized tests are used as a method of early and ongoing tracking in a student’s educational career.

I found as I was researching literature, that although pressure is existent, incentives could be provided for teachers whose students do well on standardized tests. According to Barbara Gleason (2000), in “What Do We Mean by Results?, *Policy Link/Pay for Performance*” during the National Education Summit in fall 1999, a mandate was agreed upon for at least ten states to more closely “link teacher pay to performance and skills” displayed by student achievement. Incentive plans were discussed as being added to the pay structures to give salary credits for professional development in regards to student achievement. Gleason explains that this is not a new issue, as it was implemented in England in 1862. Although remaining intact for many years, this

ideology was abandoned in the 1890s as charges arose stating that “it narrowed the curriculum and stifled teacher creativity”.

Gleason (2000) stated that although the idea of the “performance contract” surfaced in the United States in 1969, it was eventually abandoned because of fairness, funding, and poor results. But according to Gleason, the incentives have resurfaced again. The Denver Classroom Teachers Association approved a program that makes about fifteen percent of the cities teachers eligible for money bonuses in correlation to improvements in student test scores. This program is a pilot program that is instilled for two years and then voted upon to see if it will expand district-wide. Teacher unions and outsiders are also giving incentives, according to Gleason. The New York City Partnership and Chamber of Commerce is sponsoring a twenty-nine million dollar program to boost student test scores. The money will be given to raise the salaries of superintendents, principals, and teachers calculated upon whether their students have improved their standardized test scores. A question in regard to this topic remains in my mind. Why should teachers and educational officials be given extra money for something that is already required of them? Do they change or alter their instructional methods to decrease this pressure and gain incentives?

#### Affects as a Result of Pressures and Incentives

According to Popham (2001) the consequence of the enormous pressure that American teachers feel is the implementation of classroom instruction that incorporates the actual items on standardized tests as practice activities in the classroom. It is also common for teachers to give practice exercises that are a complete resemblance to the real standardized test. Teachers “clone” the items and create assignments to prepare the



students. Popham calls both instances, “Teaching to the Test”. As stated by Berube (2004), if important decisions in jobs and governmental funding rely on the student scores on standardized tests, then teachers will resort and teach to the test. Test content then becomes the curriculum.

Popham (2001) describes “teaching to the test” as *item-teaching*. This practice takes place when teachers organize their instruction and activities around the items portrayed on a standardized test. The items may be exact replicas or look-alike items, described as clones. When using this practice, teachers are teaching directly to the information on a standardized test. The cognitive content and demand in relation to the items on the test, is then unchanged.

In “Making Standards Work” by Matthew Gandal and Jennifer Vranek (2001) it can be inferred that teachers may feel forced and pressured to guide their instruction in a different manner, creating an easy transformation to “teaching to the test” rather than sticking with the “rigorous curriculum”.

Bill Metzker (2003) explains that time in the classroom can be portrayed as an inverted pyramid. At the bottom, he states is academic learning time, which is the narrowest part of the pyramid stating that actual learning time holds the least amount of attention in the classroom. He states, “Teachers, on average, spend twenty-three percent of their time on noninstructional activities.” That includes parties, fairs, and instruction focused on preparation for standardized tests.

Through my research, I found that time is an important factor in the school day. If it is used for “teaching to the test” then how are students taught skills other than the ones used for the tests? Montey Neill, the Director of the National Center for Fair and

Open Testing in Cambridge, Massachusetts, claims that important academic time is being used to prepare students for standardized tests (Baresic and Gilman, 2001). Perrone (2003) reflects on the usage of academic time as he states...

*If tests play a significant role in grade advancement or are the primary basis for a school's so-called accountability, teachers feel compelled to spend considerable time preparing children to take the tests. In such cases, the tests become the school curriculum. Preparation usually begins many weeks before actual testing. During this period, two or three hours a day are often devoted to practicing tests and related exercises, all alien to the ongoing instruction and the usual student response patterns. Teachers readily acknowledge that questions in practice exercises, which are similar to those on the real test, are trivial. Moreover, the possible responses contain words that children likely have never seen and certainly don't use. By the time the three days of real testing are over, weeks, sometimes months, have passed. Time for real books has been sacrificed for time spent reading isolated paragraphs and answering multiple-choice questions. Time has been spent not on posing problems for which math might be used, and in the process coming to a natural understanding of math concepts, but on reviewing skills such as addition, subtraction, and division—all in isolation.*

Why are teachers held accountable for student scores on standardized tests? How can society base opinions of educational officials and teachers on whether or not the students of that particular school can memorize and recall basic facts? Has society

forgotten about other skills that make up education, such as interpretation, summarization, etc.?

### Theory of Evaluation of Effective Education

According to Popham (1999) in “Using Standards and Assessments, Why Standardized Tests Don’t Measure Educational Quality”, standardized achievement tests succeed in supplying the evidence needed to make “norm-referenced interpretations of students’ knowledge and/or skills in relationship to those students nationally”. On the other hand, Popham (1999) stresses that standardized achievement tests should not be used to “evaluate the quality of education” being given in educational institutes.

There are three factors that Popham addresses providing evidence to his theory that standardized achievement tests should not be used to evaluate effective education. Standardized achievement tests contain items that reflect information that may not be taught in the classroom. The tests will always contain items that “are not aligned with what’s emphasized instructionally in a particular setting,” according to Popham (1999). This creates a gap between the curriculum taught and items on the test. The second factor being, standardized tests portray “comparisons among students from only a small collection of items”. Because of time constraints, the tests are limited gathering only a survey of the knowledge of students. The third reason that Popham addresses are the facts that some of the items on standardized tests are not taught in school, a student’s native intellectual ability comes into play, and out of school learning is a factor.

So, what do teachers teach? Do they analyze the tests and teach the items that are included or do they follow the state mandated curriculum and teach what they are told?

Do they baby their students and teach the skills that should be learned from outside sources or do they stick to the curriculum?

### Synthesis

This research fits into my study as it reflects upon classroom teaching methods as an evaluation of whether or not teachers feel the pressures to teach to the test. The research presented above creates and supports the argument that “teaching to the test” is taking place in schools at all age levels. This study examines the pressures, the incentives and the affects of standardized tests on teaching methods.

### CHAPTER III

#### CONTEXT AND METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

##### Context of the Study

This study was conducted in the Middle Atlantic region of the United States in a school district located in Camden County of southern New Jersey. Within this district reside nine elementary schools, three middle schools, and three high schools. An elementary school in the district was selected to be the setting of the study, as I was student teaching at the time of data collection. The population for this study consists of teachers ranging from kindergarten teachers to fifth grade teachers. All were asked to participate, but because of volunteerism not all did so.

Although the views of the teachers and the observations I made are the basis of my research, the economic status and structure of the community plays a role in my study. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, Gloucester Township has a total population of 64,350. Of the population of one race, 53,484 are Caucasian, 7,432 are African American, 100 are American Indian or an Alaska Native, 1,962 are Hispanic or Latino, 1,688 are Asian, 16 are Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander, and 715 of another race. The population of individuals stemming from two or more races is 915.

Gloucester Township is home to 34,751 individuals who hold an occupation dealing with labor force. The median household income is \$54,280 a year. The median

family income is \$62,992. In the township there are 745 families below poverty level and 3,934 individuals below poverty level.

The demographics of the community and socioeconomic levels within need to be taken into consideration to understand my study. The law, No Child Left Behind, has created a stir within the district and community, as testing scores were not at acceptable levels, which means the emphasis on standardized testing is accelerated.

### Research Design

The research that was done to aid my study can be described as qualitative. All research was done in natural setting and is drawn from inquiry and observation. I, the researcher, traveled to the natural setting of the participants to conduct the research for this study. Throughout my research I built a rapport and relationship with my participants. The data collected in this study does not contain many numbers, only opinions. With this in consideration, my research is based on interpretation of data gathered by investigation and examination. I used observations, analysis of materials, survey responses, and questionnaires as the basis for my research; therefore, I feel that my research is best described as qualitative based.

### Data Collection

During the study, data was collected to determine whether the practice of teaching to the test occurred in the classroom. Data was also collected to examine the feelings of teachers and students about the weight and accountability of standardized testing. Data collected consisted of teacher surveys, teacher questionnaires, my personal teacher research journal, analysis of materials, and observations. The teacher surveys consisted of nine questions asking teachers to strongly agree, somewhat agree, neutral, somewhat

disagree, or strongly disagree with each statement. The teachers were asked to circle which feeling corresponded to them. The surveys were given out and returned anonymously in order to keep all information gained private and secure. The teacher questionnaires consisted of six questions in which they were asked to provide a short response. The questionnaires accompanied the surveys were also held with great confidentiality. Both, the teacher survey and teacher questionnaire, are located in Appendix A. My personal teacher research journal allotted me space to record and reflect upon my observations. This journal does not contain names or specific information regarding a participant in this study. It is written in terms that I understand, but another may have difficulty recognizing. This journal contains documented notes of observations and the consequences pertaining to. Through the course of my study I was able to analyze different materials, which related to standardized testing. All materials studied are located in Appendix B.

### Data Analysis

Data analysis occurred in this study through description analysis and thematic text analysis (Creswell, 2003). The amount of data collected was abundant, which created a strength of the study, as well as a weakness. Taking this into consideration, I analyzed my research and broke it into four factions. The first section is in relation to my observations and reflections regarding my experience within the five-week data collection window. The second section pertains to the teacher questionnaires that were completed with short answer responses. Over fifty questionnaires were returned anonymously; therefore, I chose five to concentrate on as I analyzed my data. The third faction relates to the teacher surveys that were returned to me for analysis. Again,

because of the amount returned, I chose five to focus upon for data analysis. The final portion of my data analysis relates to the materials pertaining to standardized testing collected during the five weeks in which I was permitted to obtain data and complete my research.



## CHAPTER IV

### FINDINGS/ANALYSIS OF DATA

#### Introduction

In this chapter, the data collected has been analyzed and findings have been reported. Data was collected through the use of teacher surveys, teacher questionnaires, my observations and experiences, as well as, an analysis of materials used in relation to standardized tests. The amount of teacher surveys and teacher questionnaires returned created a limitation when synthesizing data; therefore, I have selected five from each that I feel represents the “group” findings and have explained the data in this chapter. My personal observations along with the analysis of materials will follow as a faction of this study.

#### Data

##### I. Teacher Questionnaire

The following five questionnaires have been selected as they represent the total questionnaires received. The subjects (teachers) will be represented with numbers so that they remain anonymous.

##### Teacher #1

Teacher #1 explains in the questionnaire that “teaching to the test” is when teachers design lessons using test preparation materials which have been specifically created in a format similar to standardized test questions. He/she states that “teaching to the test” happens all the time even in her classroom, as he/she spends approximately

three weeks preparing for a state assessment. Certain materials provided by the state specifically tell when to begin preparing the students, as well as providing the preparation materials.

#### Teacher #2

Teacher #2 recorded in the questionnaire that teachers should have some responsibility when it comes to student test scores. He/she feels that having some responsibility stops teachers from “slacking off”. But, it is also felt that teachers should not be held totally accountable for the scores that the students receive. Teacher #2 states that sometimes you can’t control certain factors. You can teach the skills, but if a child has outside factors that hinder test scores, that is beyond the teacher’s control. Teacher #2 recorded that he or she does not dedicate a certain amount of time reviewing for the state exams. He/she teaches the students the skills needed throughout the year and then prays that they use what was taught when taking the test. Teacher #2 explains that there is a lot of pressure and that the fear of job loss due to bad test scores is evident in the education society.

#### Teacher #3

Teacher #3 explains “teaching to the test” as the practice when teachers provide students with only the information they need to know for the test. Although teacher #3 does not fear job loss due to poor test scores, he/she spends a lot of time making sure that the skills needed are covered. By using the ASK3 Coach workbooks provided by the state, he/she spends an increased amount of time preparing for the test in the weeks prior to the exam. The materials used to review are the ASK3 Coach workbooks, portions of the regular reading series, cold reading, and math manipulatives; while math problem

solving techniques are stressed. This is all done the three weeks prior to the standardized test.

#### Teacher #4

Teacher #4 does not believe that teachers should be held accountable for poor test results. He/she explains that teachers do the best they can with the children and many other variables may come into play such as environment, parental support, test anxiety, and reading ability, which may cause test scores to be low. As a special education teacher, teacher #4 states that since special education scores have just started to count, he/she has not yet feared job loss, but that fear is something that he/she thinks will come.

#### Teacher #5

When asked to explain the phrase “teaching to the test”, teacher #5 answered, “I feel as if I spend most of my school year “teaching to the test”; that is, gearing classroom curriculum and student learning toward a specific standardized assessment.” He/she does writing prompts monthly, open-ended math questions daily, and a problem of the day daily. He/she feels the need to “cram” and conduct crash courses in the weeks before a state assessment is given. The skills not yet covered because of the time in the year that the test is administered, must be touched upon so that the students have some knowledge of that particular skill.

## II. Teacher Survey

The following five teacher surveys have been selected as a representative of all received. In the following table (Table I), the numbers one through five represent the teachers. Along the side of the table, the statements presented are listed. The teachers were given a series of statements and asked to record their feelings for each, circling the

number which best indicates their response. The chart below can be used as a key to understand the teacher responses.

1 = Strongly Agree

2 = Somewhat Agree

3 = Neutral

4 = Somewhat Disagree

5 = Strongly Disagree

<u>TABLE I-Teacher Survey</u>	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5
There is a lot of pressure on teachers, students, and higher administration to receive high state assessment scores.	2	1	1	1	1
State assessment exams are geared toward on particular type of student.	2	2	2	2	1
A student's background and socioeconomic status might effect how they perform on a state assessment exam.	2	1	1	1	1
You receive adequate training and information on how to practice for the state assessment, as well as administer it.	2	N/A	2	4	1
Incentives for teachers, administrators, and schools have been attached to good test scores.	3	N/A	3	5	2
The scores of students' state assessment exams are a good measurement of one's teaching and academic ability.	4	5	3	5	4
Student scores on state assessment exams are a good way to make comparisons of academic ability among students, as well as districts.	3	5	3	4	4
State assessment exam questions are worded appropriately for all types of learners.	4	5	4	5	5
State assessment exams are designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities.	5	4	5	5	5

### III. Personal Observations

Within the five-week data collection period I had the opportunity to observe and immerse myself in an educational setting preparing for the state assessment exams to come. I feel that the entire attitude and environment within the school changed from calm and collected to frantic individuals with anxiety. This was not only seen in the students, but the teachers as well.

Beginning at the end of February, the announcements included some sort of information regarding the upcoming state exams. At times, the announcements were for the students, but mostly the teachers were being given directions as to meetings and materials used for preparation. As the weeks progressed I began to see the teachers collecting and sharing materials that they were going to use to help the students prepare for the tests. This was taking place in all grade levels including special education, as their scores now count. As the student teacher, I had to follow the curriculum and teach to the standards, but in the weeks before the Terra Nova tests I found that I was being instructed to hand in my lesson plans in which the only thing written was "TERA NOVA REVIEW".

When testing actually began for each grade level, I felt as if I was in a prison. The hallways in which testing was taking place were off limits and if a student accidentally strolled down one, they were scolded. I witnessed a teacher yell at a student because he turned the corner to go to the bathroom in a hallway in which testing was taking place. The tension among the staff members and students was so thick and obvious.

I experienced a situation while the fifth grade was taking the Terra Nova state assessment. There was question among the fifth grade teachers as to whether or not the students were permitted to use calculators during the math sections. The teachers left it up to me to seek the answer to the question. As I ran around the school looking for the principal and the advisor of the state assessment, I was told to be quick as the students were losing time. I even walked into one fifth grade classroom to ask the teacher an opinion on the matter and was frantically pushed out of the room and told that her students could not have any noise in the room while taking the test. I finally found the test coordinator and accompanied her to each fifth grade classroom. When discussing the matter that the one fifth grade teacher opted to ban the calculators, the coordinator stated, "I don't really care if she uses them or not. She can worry about her scores. Her scores are not my problem."

All of my observations above point to the pressure on teachers and students regarding standardized tests is too great. These exams can definitely be considered high-stakes tests, as the stakes are high and the tension is thick.

#### IV. Equipment Used in Relation to Standardized Testing Review

As stated previously, I was able to observe and analyze materials that were used and passed around in preparation for the standardized state assessments. I was primarily involved in the fifth-grade within the elementary school, which allowed me to obtain materials used to prepare for the Terra Nova tests. I was able to recognize a theme that was taking place. The school and district in which I collected my data, was under pressure by the state to raise student scores in the area of mathematics.

The main material used by all the fifth-grade teachers was the “Terra Nova Review” packet. The packet can be located in Appendix B. The packet was hand made by one of the fifth-grade teachers and given to the others for use to help prepare the students. All six pages are full of examples of different types of mathematical problems that were on the Terra Nova test. It included geometry, fractions, estimation, probability, time, measurement, and math problems dealing with addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division. Three math class periods were dedicated to this packet. Two were provided for the students to work on the math problems and the third was allotted to create ample time for the teacher to go over each problem with the students. Was it necessary to spend this amount of time preparing the students?

During my student teaching experience I was given the opportunity to teach geometry, specifically transformations and congruent figures. These skills were covered in curriculum and taught to match the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards, but three weeks later they were reviewed again. I was asked to create a worksheet regarding transformations (See Appendix B) and alter another worksheet (See Appendix B) including both transformations and congruent figures. I asked myself why am I spending valuable planning time to complete these tasks when I taught the students the skills three weeks ago and they understood them with mastery?

Another material that I was able to analyze and see used was the “Test Preparation” (See Appendix B) provided by the Connecting Math Series used in the Resource Center. This six-page packet resembles the format of a standardized test. It has letter choices and directions that can be considered parallel to state exams. This packet was completed during the time allotted for reading four days in a row. These skills are

covered in the regular curriculum, so why is valuable class time being used to “cram” for the standardized test?

### Analysis

After analyzing and interpreting all of the qualitative data that I collected, I came to many conclusions. Of the teachers surveyed, most agree and understand that “teaching to the test” is *item-teaching*, as stated by Popham (2001). Teachers agree that this practice is done when lessons are organized and created along the lines of a standardized achievement test. Although there is constant pressure on teachers to have their students produce high test scores, most do not fear totally job loss, but reputations begin to form and teachers can be ranked as to what level of test scores their students produce. As Popham (1999) stated standardized test scores remain to be the most important and relied upon factor in evaluating a school. No wonder teachers feel pressure. If their job isn’t in jeopardy, their reputation is.

Their reputation is the cause that makes teachers use valuable learning time to “teach to the test” using materials and equipment that are geared toward standardized testing. Throughout my teacher research journal, I observed a pattern. As time came closer to testing, the pressure and tension rose between and among the teachers. They began to pass out materials to each other, but the teachers also began to become competitive.

I concluded through my data collection that valuable learning time is being used to prepare students for standardized exams. Each questionnaire listed materials and techniques used to help prepare students. This is done during the course of a normal school day, taking away from valuable academic time. This relates to Perrone’s (2003)



statement that, “If tests play a significant role in grade advancement or are the primary basis for a school’s so-called accountability, teachers feel compelled to spend considerable time preparing children to take the tests.” With this into consideration, my findings can yield new information regarding the amount of academic time wasted, the pressure that teachers feel and who inflicts this upon them, and why standardized tests are used as a significant determination of school ability.

It can be inferred through my data collection that standardized tests should not be used to evaluate effective education. According to Popham (1999), the tests will always contain items that “are not aligned with what’s emphasized instructionally in a particular setting”, the tests portray “comparisons among students from only a small collection of items”, and standardized test scores will always be an unfair measurement, as a student’s native intellectual ability comes into play along with out of school factors. The teachers surveyed and questioned relayed concerns as to this theory. Most said that teachers should not be held entirely accountable for student scores, as lifestyle and surroundings can cause flaws. Popham (1999) states, “Educators should definitely be held accountable, as the teaching of a nation’s children is too important to be left unmonitored.” But, he refutes his claim by saying, “But to evaluate educational quality by using the wrong assessment instruments is a subversion of good sense. Although, educators need to produce valid evidence regarding their effectiveness, standardized achievement tests are the wrong tools for the task.”

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

#### Introduction

Contained in this chapter are my findings in response to my research questions. For reference, they include: How do the pressures and incentives inflicted by standardized achievement tests affect or change teacher instruction? Should standardized achievement tests be used to measure educational effectiveness?

#### Summary of Study

This qualitative study was chosen because of my interest and experience with standardized achievement tests. Over the course of five-weeks, data was collected and analyzed to find a response in accordance to my research questions. Within the five-week time frame, I was able to survey teachers, provide them with a questionnaire, observe and reflect upon my experiences, and collect and analyze materials used pertaining to my topic questions. All data was collected anonymously, as the surveys and questionnaires were distributed and returned without a name. All teachers within the elementary school I placed were asked to participate. It was not mandatory; therefore, I did not receive all surveys and questionnaires back in my possession. Once all of my data was collected, I was able to analyze it in response to my thesis questions. I came to conclusions and saw themes that began to develop.

#### Conclusions

Through data analysis, I was able to identify and relate information regarding my thesis questions. My first faction of my questions dealt with pressure and incentives

inflicted upon teachers to generate high student test scores on standardized achievement tests. I found that pressure does exist within the context of the school where I did my student teaching. Teachers feel pressure to aid their students in any way possible, so that success can be achieved on state exams. I learned that in the school district in which I was placed to fulfill my student teaching requirements and where I was permitted to collect my data that incentives are not given to those teachers who produce high-test scores. As well as, teachers who produce low-test scores are not penalized. Although, incentives and penalizations are not given out, teachers are in fear of their reputation. This fear forces them to turn to “teaching to the test”.

I learned that most teachers understand and can identify what “teaching to the test” means, but some feel that they are not doing it within their classroom. Through my research I was able to obtain materials that were used to prepare students for the standardized test, the Terra Nova. All classes came to a halt, as teachers dusted off the review packets and distributed them to students. Valuable academic learning time was used in preparation for the Terra Nova. In each of the questionnaires returned, teachers listed different types of techniques they used to review and most stated that in the couple weeks before the test learning time is dedicated to preparation and review.

I closely looked at the survey statements and questions pertaining to the topic of using standardized tests as a measurement of a school’s academic ability. Every teacher who returned the questionnaire stated that teachers and schools should not be held accountable for student scores. Most listed outside factors such as, parental involvement, reading level, classified students, and factors dealing with socioeconomic status as

aspects that may cause students to receive low test scores on standardized achievement tests. I learned that most of the teachers surveyed felt that state assessments are written and geared towards one type of student, not including any special education student. How can society determine a school's academic ability from one test administered once a year?

### Implications

Through my research and analysis of data I discovered implications for teaching and learning. Teachers have anxiety toward reputation within their school and district wide. The pressure to obtain high student test scores causes teachers to use valuable academic learning time to prepare for standardized tests. Although teachers do not want to conform to "teaching to the test", they do in order to aid students and prepare them to receive high-test scores. Students are losing academic time, which is being replaced with packets and worksheets. State assessment exams are used to measure a school's academic level and ability. The teachers within a school want to be high ranked, without fear of job loss, which is why they resort to drastic measures such as "teaching to the test". The pressure and anxiety is unbearable and teachers are now stressing more over high-test scores rather than teaching the curriculum in line with the New Jersey Core Content Standards.

### Suggestions for Further Research

This study focused on teachers' views and opinions, my personal observations, and my analysis of materials used in preparation for the Terra Novas. For further research, I would suggest one-on-one interviews with teachers, parents, and

administration. Limitations arose during my data collection time and did not permit me to extend my research to that point. I feel that by involving all other parties in which standardized tests affect, the research would have more strength and hold a higher value. I would also suggest researching different forms of assessment that could be used to compare and evaluate schools' academic ability. By bringing in other suggestions as assessments, alternatives to standardized tests may arise.

My findings provide insight to the bridging of the achievement gap that exists. It shows that students are being denied valuable academic time in districts where it is needed most. The gap will only get wider, as schools are more interested in the funding provided by high standardized test scores, rather than educating their students.

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[www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)

Teacher Observation Research Journal (September 2004-June 2005)

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## APPENDIX A



By completing the following survey, you are agreeing to participate in a study entitled Standardized Educational Assessments: The Affects on the Educational Society, which is being conducted by Ashley Root, a Collaborative Teaching MST student from Rowan University.

The purpose of this study is to explore teachers' views on state assessment and how it affects their instruction and their student's learning. The data collected in this study will be included in my master's thesis.

All participation in this study is voluntary and participants are not required to respond to all questions and statements. All responses will be anonymous and all data gathered will be confidential. Information obtained through this survey may be used in any way thought best for publication in the thesis provided that the respondent is not identified and their name is not used.

If you have any questions or problems concerning your participation in this study you may contact Ashley Root (856) 464-2742 or faculty sponsor Dr. Susan Browne at (856) 256-4500 ext. 3748.

Please complete and return in provided envelope to Michele Kennedy's mailbox in the main office by May 4<sup>th</sup>, 2005. Thank you for your participation.

Respond to the following demographic statements.

1. Number of years of teaching experience \_\_\_\_\_
2. Highest educational degree obtained \_\_\_\_\_
3. Grade level(s) currently teaching \_\_\_\_\_
4. Gender \_\_\_\_\_

The following statements are in regards to your views on state assessment exams. Respond to these statements to the best of your ability. Circle the number which best indicates your response. You are not obligated to answer every statement or question.

1= Strongly Agree

2= Somewhat Agree

3= Neutral

4= Somewhat Disagree

5= Strongly Disagree

There is a lot of pressure on teachers, students, and higher administration to receive high state assessment scores.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

State assessment exams are geared toward one particular type of student.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

A student's background and socioeconomic status might effect how they perform on a state assessment exam.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

You receive adequate training and information on how to practice for the state assessment as well as administer it.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Incentives for teachers, administrators, and schools have been attached to good test scores.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

The scores of students' state assessment exams are a good measurement of one's teaching and academic ability.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

Student scores on state assessment exams are a good way to make comparisons of academic ability among students, as well as districts.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

State assessment exam questions are worded appropriately for all types of learners.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

State assessment exams are designed to meet the needs of students with disabilities.

1                      2                      3                      4                      5

**Please answer the following 6 questions with a short response.**

1. How would you explain the phrase "teaching to the test"?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
2. Do you think teachers should be held accountable for bad test results? Why or why not?
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
3. About how much time in the school year do you spend reviewing for the annual state assessment exams?

4. In the weeks before a state assessment test do you spend more time than usual reviewing skills needed?
5. What are some ways or techniques that you use in your classroom that help prepare your students for state assessments?
6. Have you every feared a loss of job due to bad test scores?

## APPENDIX B

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Terra Nova Review

①  $52.3 - 24.07 =$  \_\_\_\_\_

②  $\frac{2}{7} + \frac{2}{7} =$  \_\_\_\_\_

③  $638 \times 52 =$  \_\_\_\_\_

④  $\frac{1}{4} + \frac{1}{3} =$  \_\_\_\_\_

⑤  $720 \div 90 =$  \_\_\_\_\_

⑥ 
$$\begin{array}{r} 7.2 \\ \times 0.4 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} \textcircled{7} \quad 10 \frac{5}{6} \\ - \quad 6 \frac{4}{6} \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$$\begin{array}{r} \textcircled{8} \quad 2 \frac{4}{9} \\ + 3 \frac{4}{9} \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$$\textcircled{9} \quad \frac{5}{8} - \frac{1}{8} =$$

$$\textcircled{10} \quad \frac{8}{10} - \frac{1}{5} =$$

$$\begin{array}{r} \textcircled{11} \quad 5000 \\ \times \quad 82 \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$$\textcircled{12} \quad 27 \overline{) 5123}$$

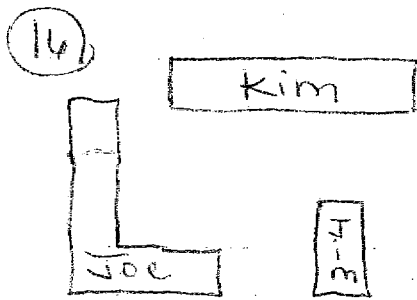
13) Estimate

$$9 \overline{) 7305}$$

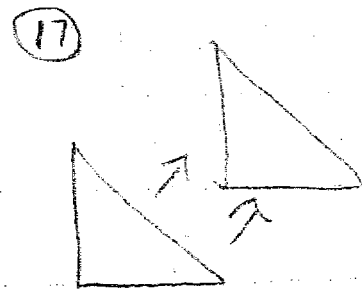
14) Estimate

$$6 \overline{) 492}$$

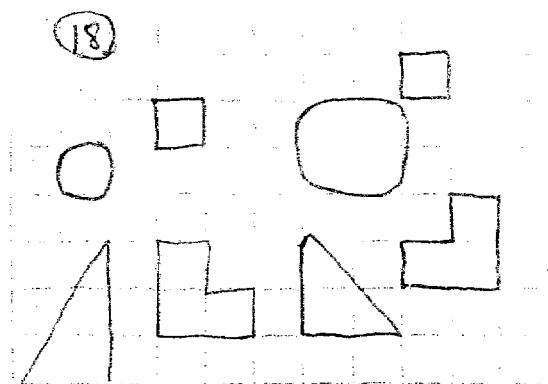
15) There are 1623 pennies in a jar. How many dollars would you get if you exchanged them at the bank?



Put these in order from the longest perimeter to the shortest perimeter.

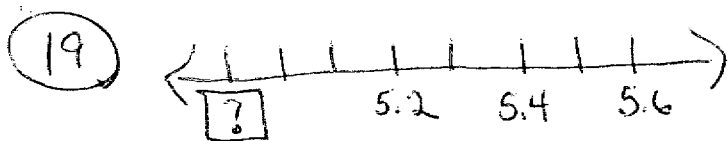


flip slide turn

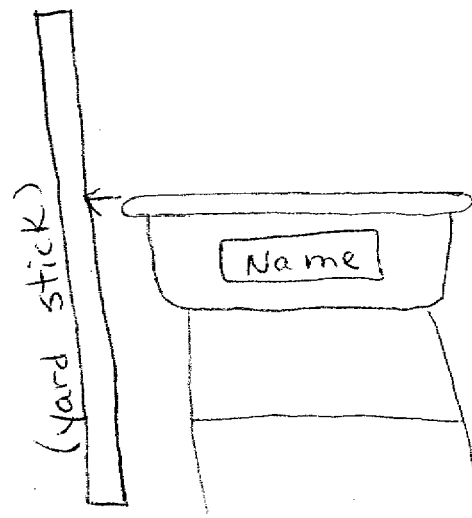


Circle the shapes that are congruent.





20



How tall is the desk?

21 Science test grades.

98, 72, 89, 96

What is the average?

22

8

6

2

5

7

9

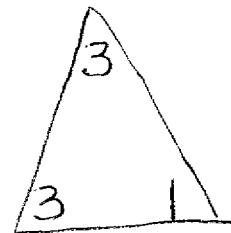
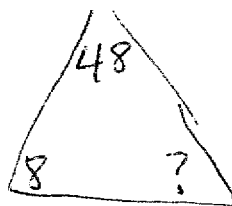
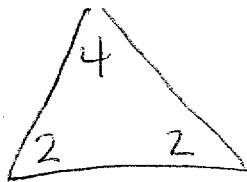
3

2

What is the probability  
of picking an odd  
number? \_\_\_\_\_

What is the probability  
of picking a number  
greater than 4? \_\_\_\_\_

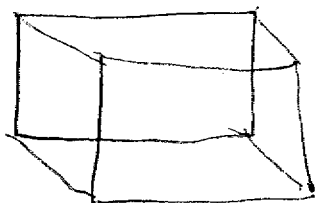
23



What is the missing #?

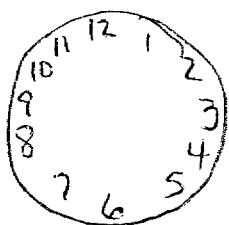
24

How many edges does a cube have?



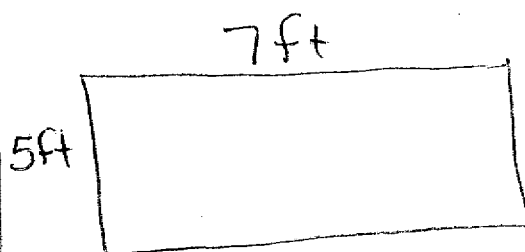
25

If it is 10:50 A.m. It takes 45 minutes to get to the airport. What time will you get there? Draw it on the clock.



26

What is the area?  
What is the perimeter?

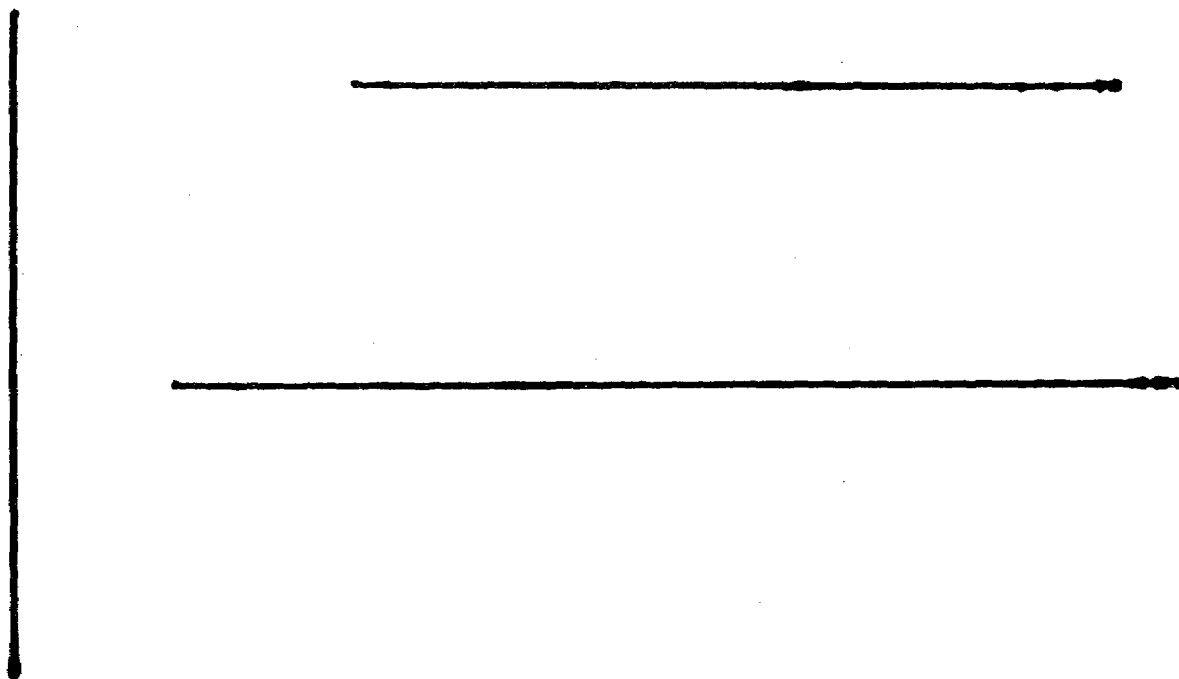


Area = \_\_\_\_\_  
Perimeter = \_\_\_\_\_

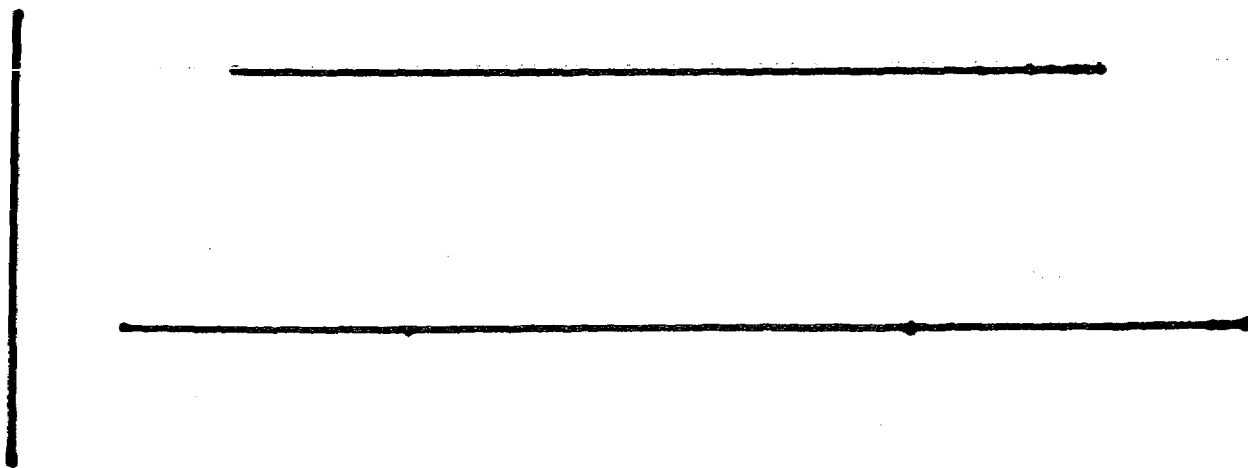
Name \_\_\_\_\_ # \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

### Measurement Practice

Find the measurement of each line in inches.



Find the measurement of each line in centimeters.

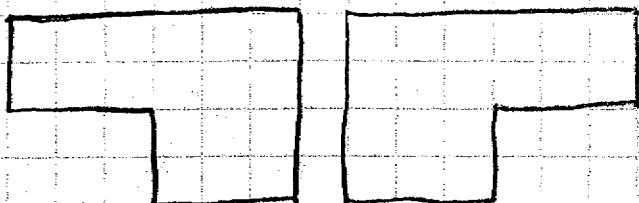


Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

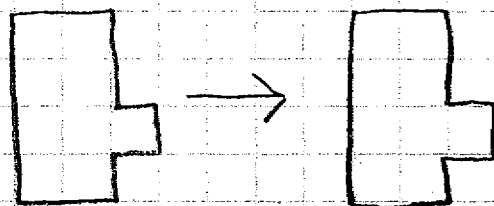
# Flip, Slide, Turn

Directions: Below each figure tell what motion took place.

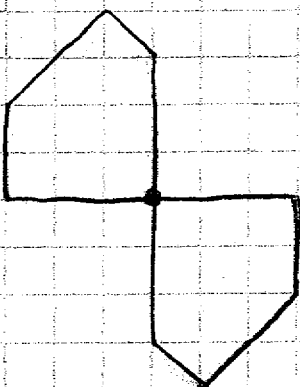
①



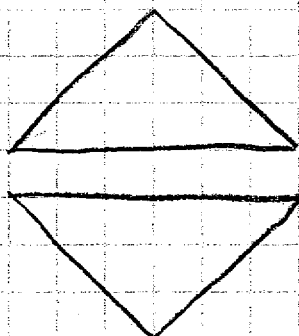
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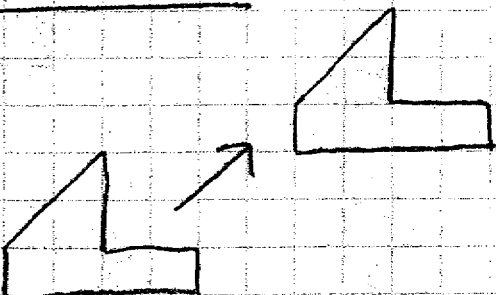
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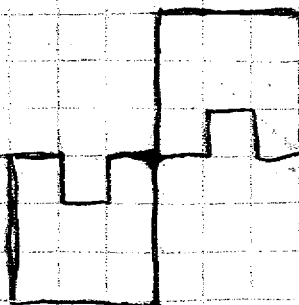
④



⑤




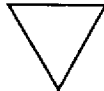








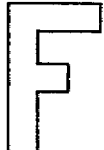
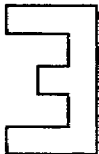


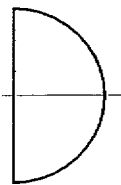
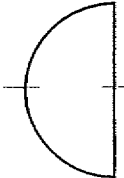
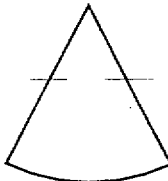


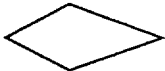
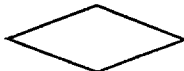



⑥



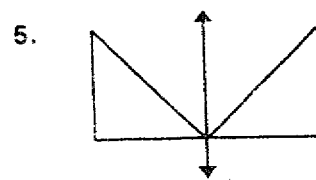
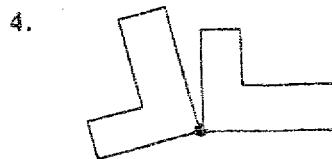
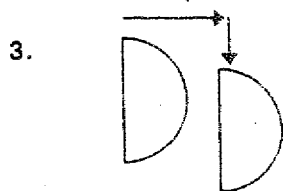
# Congruent Figures

Circle the letter of the figure that is congruent to the first figure in each row.

1.		a.		b.		c.	
2.		a.		b.		c.	
3.		a.		b.		c.	
4.		a.		b.		c.	
5.		a.		b.		c.	
6.		a.		b.		c.	

## Motion

Write *slide*, *flip*, or *turn* to indicate how each figure was moved.



\_\_\_\_\_

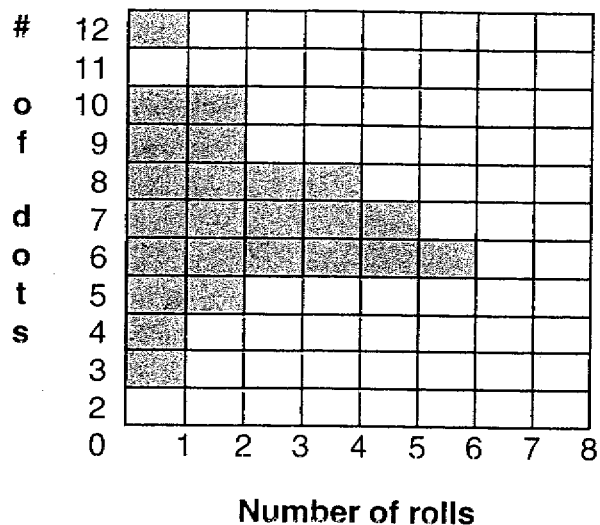
\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# Test Preparation

## Lesson 6

Two dice are rolled 24 times. The number of dots showing are counted for each roll. The chart below shows how many dots were showing for each roll.



1 What is the median roll?

- A 12
- B 6
- C 7
- D 8
- E None of the above

2 What is the mode roll?

- F 6
- G 7
- H 8
- I 12
- J None of the above

$$\begin{array}{r} 3 \quad \frac{3}{6} \\ + \frac{5}{6} \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$\frac{8}{6}$

**A**

$\frac{2}{6}$

**B**

$\frac{15}{6}$

**C**

$\frac{15}{36}$

**D**

$\frac{2}{0}$

**E**

$$\begin{array}{r} 4 \quad \frac{7}{10} \\ - \frac{5}{10} \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$\frac{12}{10}$

**F**

$\frac{10}{10}$

**G**

$\frac{2}{10}$

**H**

$\frac{3}{10}$

**I**

None of these

**J**

$$\begin{array}{r} 5 \quad \frac{3}{9} \\ + \frac{4}{9} \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$\frac{9}{9}$

**A**

$\frac{7}{9}$

**B**

$\frac{1}{9}$

**C**

$\frac{12}{9}$

**D**

None of these

**E**

$$\begin{array}{r} 6 \quad \frac{16}{5} \\ - \frac{10}{5} \\ \hline \end{array}$$

$\frac{26}{5}$

**F**

$\frac{16}{5}$

**G**

$\frac{6}{0}$

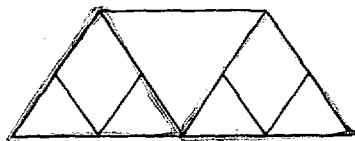
**H**

$\frac{6}{5}$

**I**

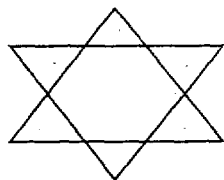
None of these

**J**



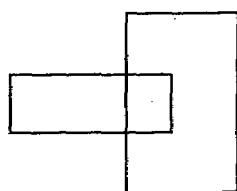
9 How many triangles are in the above figure?

- |          |          |          |          |               |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------------|
| 2        | 4        | 7        | 6        | None of these |
| <b>A</b> | <b>B</b> | <b>C</b> | <b>D</b> | <b>E</b>      |



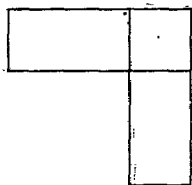
10 How many triangles are in the above figure?

- |          |          |          |          |               |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------------|
| 6        | 8        | 9        | 10       | None of these |
| <b>F</b> | <b>G</b> | <b>H</b> | <b>I</b> | <b>J</b>      |



11 How many rectangles are in the above figure?

- |          |          |          |          |               |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------------|
| 2        | 3        | 4        | 5        | None of these |
| <b>A</b> | <b>B</b> | <b>C</b> | <b>D</b> | <b>E</b>      |



12 How many rectangles are in the above figure?

- |          |          |          |          |               |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------------|
| 2        | 3        | 4        | 5        | None of these |
| <b>F</b> | <b>G</b> | <b>H</b> | <b>I</b> | <b>J</b>      |



Input	Output
5	14
3	?
7	?
10	?
0	?

**Rule:** Multiply by 2, then add 4.

**13** What is the output number for an input number of 3?

- |          |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 3        | 11       | 12       | 10       |
| <b>A</b> | <b>B</b> | <b>C</b> | <b>D</b> |

**14** What is the output number for an input number of 7?

- |          |          |          |          |               |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------------|
| 18       | 16       | 14       | 13       | None of these |
| <b>F</b> | <b>G</b> | <b>H</b> | <b>I</b> | <b>J</b>      |

**15** What is the output number for an input number of 10?

- |          |          |          |          |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|
| 20       | 22       | 24       | 26       |
| <b>A</b> | <b>B</b> | <b>C</b> | <b>D</b> |

**16** What is the output number for an input number of 0?

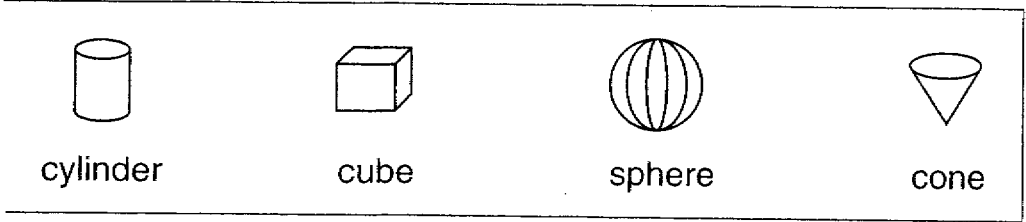
- |          |          |          |          |               |
|----------|----------|----------|----------|---------------|
| 0        | 6        | 2        | 5        | None of these |
| <b>F</b> | <b>G</b> | <b>H</b> | <b>I</b> | <b>J</b>      |

**19** Which of these is equal to \$1.75?

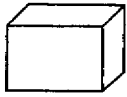
- A** A dollar bill, two quarters, and three dimes
- B** A dollar bill, three nickels, and three dimes
- C** A dollar bill, two half dollars, and a nickel
- D** A dollar bill, a half dollar, and a quarter

**20** Which of these is equal to \$2.00?

- F** A dollar bill and two quarters
- G** A dollar bill and two half dollars
- H** A dollar bill and eight dimes
- I** A dollar bill and 10 nickels



Study the objects. Then answer items 21 through 25.



1



2



3



4



5



6



7



8



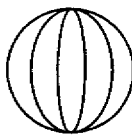
9



10



11



12

1	Which number shows the small sphere?	5	2	6	3	4
		A	B	C	D	E
2	Which number shows the large cylinder?	5	2	6	3	5
		F	G	H	I	J
3	Which number shows the large cube?	1	2	7	10	8
		A	B	C	D	E
4	Which number shows the large cone?	2	6	10	9	3
		F	G	H	I	J
5	Which number shows the large sphere?	10	12	5	9	6
		A	B	C	D	E

# Independent Work

## Lesson 6

HW

Write items 1 through 18 on lined paper and work them.

Rewrite problems in a column if they need to be worked that way.

1  $2 \times 56 =$

$$\begin{array}{r} 56 \\ \times 2 \\ \hline 112 \end{array}$$

2  $25 \times 891 =$

$$\begin{array}{r} 891 \\ \times 25 \\ \hline 4455 \\ 17820 \\ \hline 22275 \end{array}$$

3  $\begin{array}{r} 381 \\ \times 24 \\ \hline \end{array}$

4  $\begin{array}{r} 576 \\ - 135 \\ \hline \end{array}$

5  $\begin{array}{r} 435 \\ - 107 \\ \hline \end{array}$

6  $\begin{array}{r} \$3.08 \\ + 2.14 \\ \hline \end{array}$

7  $12 + 136 + 9 =$

8  $623 + 509 =$

9  $\begin{array}{r} \$0.63 \\ - 0.12 \\ \hline \end{array}$

10  $\begin{array}{r} \$0.47 \\ + 0.78 \\ \hline \end{array}$

11  $7 \times 38 =$

12  $\frac{12}{4} - \frac{7}{4} =$

13  $\frac{8}{9} + \frac{5}{9} =$

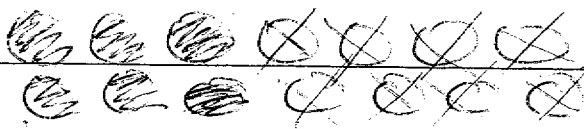
14  $3 \overline{)705}$

15  $5 \overline{)155}$

16 On a farm, Joan had chickens, goats, sheep, and pigs. She had 11 chickens, 3 goats, and 7 sheep. She had 30 animals in all. How many pigs did Joan have?

17 Steve was 15 inches shorter than Kim. Together, Steve and Kim weighed 195 pounds. Kim was 70 inches tall. How tall was Steve?

18 Tina ate 3 cherries for every 7 cherries she picked. Tina ate 42 cherries. How many cherries did she pick



14 rows

STOP

She picked  $\begin{array}{r} 2 \\ 14 \\ \times 7 \\ \hline 98 \end{array}$  cherries