



**Assessment, high stakes, and alternative visions:
Appropriate use of the right tools to leverage
improvement**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

by

**Dan Laitsch
Assistant Professor
Simon Fraser University**

The Great Lakes Center for Education Research & Practice
PO Box 1263
East Lansing, MI 48826
Phone: (517) 203-2940
Email: greatlakescenter@greatlakescenter.org
Web Site: <http://www.greatlakescenter.org>

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<http://www.greatlakescenter.org>

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This brief examines the theoretical basis behind high-stakes accountability, the intended and unintended consequences of such systems, and proposed alternative reform models. It also reviews existing research on all models, although the research is scant for some alternatives. As a caution to research consumers, the brief also details the highly political nature of much related contemporary research.

Review of the research on high-stakes assessment, the current dominant reform model, indicates that it corrupts the systems it intends improve and is unlikely to produce positive change.

Therefore, it is recommended that policy makers:

- Refocus reform emphasis to include building school capacity as well imposing professional accountability.
- Abandon high-stakes accountability mechanisms, which produce not only questionable improvement in student learning but also unintended, significant negative consequences.
- Align new assessment systems with professional guidelines for ethical use of assessment data.
- Broaden the methods of data collection to better evaluate the multiple purposes of education.