

State subjecting kindergartners to high-stakes tests

By Kathleen Oropeza
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Who in their right mind would subject kindergartners to seven or more high-stakes, end-of-course exams? The Florida Legislature, that's who.

There's no way to sugar-coat this. It's been covered with disbelief in the national press by liberals and conservatives alike. Everyone is shaking their heads and asking: "What the heck, Florida?"

Come November, it's a question every voter in this state should be asking too. Back in 2011, state senators and representatives decided to bring teacher evaluations to the boiling point by passing Florida State Statute 1008.22(6), effective this year. It imposes an unconscionable multi-million dollar unfunded mandate on districts requiring them to pay for the development and administration of thousands of new assessments for every K-12 "course" not currently addressed by state exams.

This law ignores the fact that young children learn material as subjects, not courses, within the context of a single class. In fact, numerous effective diagnostic methods already exist to assist teachers and help young students achieve. Florida's youngest public school students will now sit for assessments similar to those taken by older students in these subjects: Language Arts, Math, Music, P.E., Art, Science and Social Studies. They may also be tested on additional courses such as: Introduction to Computers, Dance, Health, French, Spanish, Theatre, Band and Orchestra.

To make matters worse, the process lacks uniformity since individual districts are allowed to determine the value of these tests. For example, one district may choose to weight the K-2 exams as 30 percent of overall student performance in that subject area, while another may choose a weight of zero.

In a nutshell, this is about using our children to play hardball with teacher evaluations while forcing districts to spend millions of dollars they don't have to develop thousands of new high stakes tests. As always, Florida's children are the ultimate victims. At the very least, parents should resent the instructional time that will be lost to this nonsense.

Florida Sen. David Simmons recently expressed alarm over the hyper-testing of 6-year-olds during a television interview. Reformer Neil McCluskey from the CATO Institute

went on Fox and Friends decrying Florida's heavy handed top-down “one size fits all” testing of little children. Unfortunately, the Florida Legislature is famous for passing bad laws and vowing to fix them later. When they pass bad laws, good people get hurt.

The Florida Department of Education has failed to produce written guidelines for districts regarding multiple end of course assessments for small children. The Department has known for three years that this day was coming, yet they remain strangely silent. Where's their careful explanation justifying the importance of stressing out six-year-olds with seven end-of-course exams?