

Bill A1918 would mandate standardized testing for homeschoolers. New Jersey homeschoolers oppose mandatory standard assessment testing requirements, and so should all taxpayers and homeowners in New Jersey.

Testing requirements have no impact on homeschooling success or failure. There is no difference in academic performance among students in states with high regulation and those with little regulation. A 1997 study by Dr. Brian Ray of the National Home Education Research Institute supports this claim.

Assessment tests are tools used by administrators and funding agents to check on the effectiveness of the money they are spending. Parents are ultimately responsible for the care and education of their children. Parents who delegate this responsibility to a public or private school may make some claim that a school provide an assessment of how well it is doing with this delegated responsibility. Taxpayers as well, may make some claim for a

school to justify the results of how the taxpayer's money has been spent.

Homeschooling parents in New Jersey spend their own money on curriculum choices and educational activities. It is up to the parents to decide whether this money was spent wisely. Homeschooling parents in New Jersey have not delegated their responsibility to care and educate their children to others.

Standardized assessment tests are designed to test how well children have learned the specific curriculum material that is taught in public schools. Many homeschooling families have found unconventional and very effective methods of teaching their children and with proven success. Many of their children however, would be at a disadvantage if annually tested at specific ages with standardized tests that have been developed to match public school curriculums. This would be blatantly unfair. As homeschoolers, we are compelled to teach the equivalent subject areas as public schools not to teach them in the same time schedule.

There is a long-standing debate in public education on the value of standardized testing in that environment. I frequently read of teachers, school administrators and politicians arguing that students from differing geographic areas or socioeconomic classes should or should not be subject to a particular test. In an October 27, 2001 New York Times article covering debate of the McGreevey/Schundler governor's race, several educational experts were quoted regarding Mr. Schundler's proposal that public school students take a standardized test like the Stanford Achievement test at each school year's start and finish. Harcourt Brace, the producer of the Stanford Achievement test is quoted as issuing this warning: "Research has demonstrated that student achievement is influenced by a host of factors beyond the teacher's control...It is strongly recommended that the student test results not be used as a criterion for evaluating teacher performance."

There is a relatively new term in the public education world called "high stakes testing."

The tests are labeled “high stakes”, when a student’s score on the test determines major decisions about the student, such as moving from one grade to another and in some cases graduating. The tests proposed by A1918 would be High Stakes tests – as they would most certainly be used to make major decisions for individual homeschoolers. According to the National Institute for Fair and Open Testing, high stakes testing causes damage to both individual students and education, and it is not a reasonable method for improving schools. They cite 5 reasons, three of which are applicable to the homeschool debate today.

1. High-stakes tests are unfair to many students. Some students do not test well, they are affected by test anxiety and do not demonstrate their learning well and thereby receive inaccurately low scores.
2. High-stakes tests produces a phenomenon called “teaching to the test”. In order to assure that students score well on the tests, much of their curriculum is designed specifically address the subject matter in the

tests. What is not tested tends to be dropped from curriculum choices, especially those subjects that are difficult to test with paper-and-pencil tests – such as writing, science experimentation, and creative subjects.

3. High-stakes tests misinform the public.

“Teaching to the test” causes score inflation – i.e. the scores do not represent improved learning – but only a change of focus. As well most tests are prepared in secret – and it is difficult to determine what students are expected to know. The only thing that can really be known after taking a high stakes test, is how well the student did on that particular test – it is not a reliable indicator of actual learning and knowledge.

If these tests are not suited to even the presumably homogenous group of public schooled students and teachers, then I find it hard to believe they would be of value to homeschoolers.

I conclude by saying homeschoolers in New Jersey stand opposed to A1918, the specific requirements for mandatory standardized assessments are unnecessary and wasteful of personal and taxpayer resources. They are Unnecessary, Unfunded, and Unfair.