

# **Closing the Testing Time-Gap**

by Dr. Dorothy Rich

The much discussed achievement gap in school is not the only gap to worry about. At this time in the school year, the testing time-gap is the one to look out for and it's almost never discussed.

Children take tests almost at the very end of the school year – mid to late May. Results come back, if they come back in time, just as school gets out for the summer.

So, the question is this: when do teachers have the time to teach what children need to know and what they didn't know on those tests they just took.

When visiting a school the other day, I peeked into all the classrooms as I usually do. In one I saw a teacher huddling with a small group of students. “What's happening in there?” I asked. The answer: “Not nearly enough and not nearly enough time to provide it.”

When test results come in, they may be in time to get the kids who need help into summer school, if there is summer school. Or, may be not, and those youngsters, who had trouble on the tests, will backtrack even more during the long summer break.

Maybe there is time in the last few days of the school year to teach children what they did not know on the test, but probably not. What happens is that the children have been tested and labeled, but they have not been taught what they didn't know... all because of the testing time-gap.

We give tests so late in the school year to give students the chance to demonstrate what they have learned during the year. Increasingly, with teachers on the hot seat of accountability, giving the tests as late as possible in the year gives teachers a better chance to show what they have taught. How do we make progress based on these test results, when there is no time to give the help that students need.

And, what about the sharing of the test results with parents? The results have to go home explained, in common sense language. “This is what your child knows. This is what your child needs to learn. Here is how you can and must help.”

We have to find answers to this problem of the time gap. Perhaps we

should test in the fall. Yet, many teachers are concerned that children forget so much over the summer.

Testing has its place and finding its proper place and time in the school year had not been solved. Do we really know how much time in the school year is spent in the preparing for giving and taking of tests? These now include school, state and national tests. When I ask about time spent on testing at the different schools I work with, I get widely different answers. One administrator said that testing takes three weeks of the school year.

For parents, struggling to deal with both the tensions and the timing of tests, here what I call the three WHEN questions. These need to be asked and answered.

**When will the results of the tests be available?**

**When will the results be explained to me and my child?**

**When will we learn what can be done at school and home to build greater achievement on these tests?**

One thing for sure, no matter how many tests are given, we have to find the time to teach what the tests have revealed. Tests can help us know what children know. And, they teach us what children still need to know. We need a schedule that works for both testing and the teaching that has to come afterwards. By eliminating this testing time-gap, we may also be able to make a dent in the achievement gap.

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**About the Writer:**

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