

Sunday, April 30, 2006

Short Article

NCLB and High-stakes Tests: "We Spit on You"
(Please excuse the gross language)

News Item:

Spit Test Spots Child's Stress -- Could children's saliva hold clues to their anxieties about relationships with parents or teachers?

Fri Apr 28, 11:53 PM ET

FRIDAY, April 28 (HealthDay News) This article notes that a simple saliva test could provide clues about children's anxieties. The article notes that... "a stress-linked enzyme, alpha amylase, is a marker for the sympathetic nervous system's (SNS) "fight or flight" response." <http://tinyurl.com/enx23>

One quote in particular should have raised red flags about what we are doing to our children with the emphasis upon high-stakes testing.

"Examples of social stressors used in the research included babies being gently restrained by a stranger and older children being asked to complete a frustrating task or being evaluated."

<http://tinyurl.com/enx23>

So, high-stakes tests appear to be a double-whammy for our students, i.e., 1.) a frustrating task and 2.) an evaluation.

"Being able to monitor alpha amylase via a salivary test may open new opportunities to characterize individual differences in response to stress that we weren't able to see before. We think that these differences could prove to be meaningful in understanding behavior," Dr. Douglas A. Granger, associate professor of biobehavioral health and human development and family studies at Penn State University, said in a prepared statement.

<http://tinyurl.com/enx23>

Perhaps our elected officials and bureaucratic decision-makers can't see the handwriting on the wall, but they could find the evidence of the error of their test-crazed ways on the floor and in bathroom sinks through enzyme markers in the spit of our over-stressed students.

We have toyed with the idea of a Web site and a SpitonNCLB movement, but have not decided whether we want to be associated with such a gross campaign.

Basically, everyone could send a 3"x5" card with the name, age, city and state of each student that is stressed by the excesses of the high-stakes test movement to their senators, congressional representative. A card to Margaret Spelling, Secretary of Education, and to President Bush might also be useful.

If we could trust this process, and believed that such cards wouldn't spread a Bird Flu (or another pandemic), we might move forward with the idea. Each card could contain a sample of spittle from each stressed student (allowed to dry, of course). But such cards might endanger postal workers and congressional staff workers, without ever being seen by our representatives.

Perhaps, instead, we could create a virtual SpitonNCLB movement, where symbolic stress-level E-mail messages are delivered to our lawmakers.

Our politicians have to be out-of-touch when on one hand, they build a high-stress environment for our children and their teachers; then, on the other hand, bemoan that their stressed victims are getting fat.

Although NCLB-inflicted stress is not the sole cause of stress in our schools, its negative effects are pervasive and detrimental.

Ridding our schools of a bad law will leave a vacuum in vision that can be filled by the leadership of teachers, not politicians.

A law that began as a backdoor method to provide vouchers for private schools has subverted educational common sense. Our students don't need the added stress of this high-stakes testing mania, testing that would not be justified, even if the NCLB law stood a "snowball's chance" of improving education.

Let's see how the SpitonNCLB movement evolves in the next few weeks.

Any ideas?

Posted by Classroom Toolkit Newsletter in Short Article at 10:00