

a Real Schools Now report

# Behind the Test Scores: Teaching and Learning Under Arrest

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WITH SUPPORT FROM  
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# Behind the Test Scores: Teaching and Learning Under Arrest

## THE REAL SCHOOLS NOW CAMPAIGN

The REAL Schools Now! Campaign was launched in 2005 in West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD).

The campaign works to reclaim public schools and make learning for our district's students of color relevant, meaningful, challenging and supportive.

The campaign is made up of families in the district along with teachers and community members and is staffed by Justice Matters, a nonprofit organization working for racial justice in education.

## THE SURVEY AND FOCUS GROUP PROJECT

In the spring of 2007, the REAL Schools Now! Campaign in collaboration with the United Teachers of Richmond carried out a project to survey and conduct focus groups with district teachers. The survey gathered information from teachers in WCCUSD about how testing and curriculum policies and practices are affecting teaching and learning in the classroom and are impacting students, in particular low-income students of color.

The focus groups generated input from teachers about possible solutions that address the negative effects that these policies have on students. This report focuses on the findings from the teacher surveys. The findings from our focus groups will be available at a later date.

For more information on the organizations that worked on this project and report please refer to the section about the organizations at the end of the report.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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REAL Schools Now! Campaign Leaders: Dr. DeTrice Rodgers, Wendy Gonzalez, Lorie Chinn, Ana Ore, the Lemons Family, Maria Maldonado, the George Family, Maria Ramirez, Guadalupe Espinoza, Angelica Rodriguez, Luz Alvarado and Ema Reyes

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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

"The joy of learning in school has been lost. There is no enrichment or enlightenment." -5th grade teacher at non-Title I school

The current West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) policies and practices that relate to testing and curriculum result in a narrow, unresponsive, and superficial education for thousands of low-income students of color. These policies react to a climate where federal and state laws create great pressure to focus on testing. In an effort to avoid federal punitive consequences based on standardized test results, the district has created a climate that emphasizes raising tests scores over high quality learning that prepares students for all aspects of their future.

This report describes the teaching and learning crisis students are facing in schools throughout WCCUSD.

## KEY FINDINGS

### **Testing Students is not Teaching Students**

The test-driven climate forces teachers to rush to cover all the content that might be on the tests and does not allow them time to be truly responsive to student needs and learning. Three out of four (76%) teachers surveyed said that they do not have adequate time to use a student's test results to better teach that student and almost half of the teachers (48%) said that their school did not have a process to help them understand how to use the test results to help their students. Furthermore, over one quarter (28%) of teachers said that the standardized assessment results are not helpful or can even play a negative role for improving their students' learning.

The emphasis on scores rather than learning is apparent in the findings. Seventy percent (70%) of teachers have been directed to give attention to certain students who are more likely to raise test score averages. More than half (55%) of teachers said this strategy impacts the rest of the students who do not receive the additional attention.

"Title I" schools are schools that serve the highest concentrations of low-income families in the district. The teachers surveyed in the Title I schools faced added pressure to focus on students who could raise school test score results. Amongst middle school teachers that are directed to give certain students attention based on scores, 69% are Title I teachers, twice the percentage of non-Title I teachers. Furthermore, high school teachers were asked if they had students taken out of a course they teach to prepare for the CAHSEE, the test needed to graduate from high school. Findings showed that Title I teachers were three times more likely to have their students taken out of a course than non-Title I teachers.

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## **Mechanical Classrooms for Human Students**

Most teachers reported that they must structure the school day in a way that does not allow them to cover topics in depth. Sixty-Seven percent (67%) of teachers do not have sufficient time to go back over concepts and skills that students have not yet mastered. Furthermore, 78% of elementary school teachers said that there are core subject areas that they are not able to teach their students. Teachers are reporting that the frequency of classroom activities such as lecture, class discussions, one-on-one time, etc. is not what it should be.

Title I teachers spent much more time than non-Title I teachers carrying out “test prep” activities such as using practice tests and other material specifically to get students ready for tests. Of the teachers that reported that they used test prep activities every day, almost three quarters (72%) were teachers from Title I schools. This disparity is even starker amongst middle schools where 94% of the teachers saying that they used test prep activities every day are in Title I schools, and amongst elementary schools, where 68% are in Title I schools.

## **Lack of Support for Teachers to Help Their Students Learn**

Survey data show that in most areas, teachers find that the professional development available to them through the district was not effective in supporting them to help their students learn. Over half of the teachers (55%) do not find that professional development is based on what they need to help students learn. Specifically, middle school Title I teachers were the most likely to cite this with 71% feeling that professional development is not helping. Sixty percent (60%) of teachers did not find professional development effective in two or more of the following areas: meeting a diversity of student learning needs, gaining knowledge for building strong relationships with students and their families, teaching students far below grade level, and effectively teaching students from a variety of cultures and communities.

## **English Language Learner (ELL) Students Deserve to Learn**

In a district with a fast growing English Language Learner (ELL) student population, teachers are saying they are not supported in providing their ELL students with a strong curriculum and teaching approach.

Most teachers (85%) believe that it is important to use graphics, deepen content knowledge, and address various levels of English fluency well, but almost half (48%) are not getting the support they need to carry this out in at least two of the above strategies with their ELL students. Furthermore, most (83%) teachers feel it is important to integrate home language and culture into the curriculum yet well over half (58%) do not receive the support to do this for their students.

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## **What Does It All Add Up To?**

Many teachers are saying that what they are being told to do in the classroom will not prepare students for life beyond tests. Over one third of teachers (38%) felt their students would leave their grade level not being able to form independent opinions and conclusions about the content area covered. Shortly behind that, 36% of teachers felt their students were unlikely to develop leadership skills. At the high school level, Title I teachers were 9 times more likely than non-Title I teachers to say their students were unlikely to acquire leadership skills. More than a quarter of all teachers (28%) also felt that their students would leave their grade level unlikely to have developed as engaged and invested learners.

## **Teaching and Learning Beyond Testing**

The following are policy principles that the REAL Schools Now! Campaign will use to work with families, teachers, and policy makers in turning community vision into education policy that will transform students into masters of their minds and futures.

## **Reclaiming the Mechanized Classroom**

Students deserve teaching that captures their imaginations and inspires them to succeed in school—in essence, they deserve teaching practices that take advantage of the thirst for knowledge that drives children and young people everyday.

## **Beyond the Text Book, Beyond the School Walls:**

### **Creating Leaders, Solution-builders, Peace-fighters, and Life-long Learners**

Low-income students of color have the right to know about their past, they have a right to use the scientific knowledge their direct ancestors created and gave the modern world, and they have a right to learn how to collaborate with one another to build solutions for their future.

## **Supporting Bilingual Scholars**

English language learners are ambassadors of communities that are building an incredible base of cultural, political, social and economic value through language and cultural arts for our society and must receive the support they need to be successful.

## **Supporting our Teachers**

Our vision and principles for improving student learning can only be achieved if teachers are supported and respected by administrators, elected leaders and the community. Teachers go into the profession of teaching with ideals, skills and passion only to be met with restrictions that limit their creativity and sap their drive. They are trained to rigidly implement textbook curriculum in a room of students that are calling out for teachers that can be creative, responsive and culturally relevant.

## **Learning from Models at Home and Elsewhere**

There are many wise and skilled people in our district that have been carrying out the principles described above for years. Justice Matters was able to document some of this work in the teacher focus groups we conducted. Identifying and tapping into our many homegrown resources, as well as other models, will be vital to transforming learning for our students.

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## INTRODUCTION

### **Background:**

#### What's the Problem with Standardized Tests and High-Stakes Testing?

Standardized tests are tests that are administered and scored in a standard or consistent way. Students in two different schools in two different cities take the same test in the same way and are scored according to the same method. Standardized tests are a relatively inexpensive and efficient way to find out how large groups of students are doing. However, most standardized tests cover a very narrow range of thinking and skills because it is hard to measure more complex learning that involves analysis, creativity, and forming independent conclusions with this format.

While standardized tests have been around for a long time, students in the United States today spend a great deal more time taking such tests than ever before. Legislation such as the federal law, No Child Left Behind, is behind this increase in standardized testing. This legislation came about partly in response to concerns that too many students were falling through the cracks. Requiring all students to take the same set of  
*(continued on page 9)*

## Introduction

"Kids need more practice time, creative problem solving and working-together time. Assessments should not all be pencil and paper."

-2nd grade teacher at Title I school

The current West Contra Costa Unified School District (WCCUSD) policies and practices that relate to testing and curriculum result in a narrow, unresponsive, and superficial education for thousands of low-income students of color. Due to an effort to avoid federal punitive consequences based on standardized test results, the district has developed policies and practices that emphasize raising tests scores. Unfortunately this climate results in rigid approaches to curriculum and teaching practices that do not meet students' learning needs. Children are receiving an education that focuses on raising test scores rather than preparing them for all aspects of their future.

Often low-income students of color are the ones that most intensively bear the brunt of these policies from their early years in elementary school through their later years in middle and high school, all adding up to a mechanized and shallow education. Justice Matters believes that district policies and practices that are solely driven by test score results are a major cause of a learning crisis that denies students a right to a real education.

The origin of standardized testing in the United States is closely tied to the "eugenics" movement, a movement that was shaped by the belief that intelligence varies according to racial and ethnic group<sup>1</sup>. Testing was intentionally used to prove a connection between intelligence and race and to then sort students of color into nonacademic settings. Today, a stated intention of high-stakes testing is to close the achievement gap between students of color and white students. However, the nature of standardized, high-stakes testing and the prioritization of this type of accountability system over high quality teaching and learning continues to result in sorting students of color into lower quality educational settings or pushing them out of school altogether.

<sup>1</sup>Stoskopf, Alan. "The Forgotten History Of Eugenics" *Rethinking Schools* 13.3 (1999): 1-5.

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## **Background:**

What's the Problem with Standardized Tests and High-Stakes Testing?  
(from page 8)

tests would be an efficient way to ensure that all students were being held to the same standard and would make it easier to identify when students were failing to meet that standard. Along with more tests, legislation has also called for "high-stakes" that is testing students and tying low test results to major—high-stakes—punitive consequences for schools and students. However, testing experts and researchers have found that high stakes tend to undermine high quality school improvement, and do not even do a good job at raising test scores over a sustained period of time. Furthermore, as the Justice Matters survey shows, too many standardized tests along with high stakes often make the quality of education worse for many students. So much punitive pressure tied to a test that can only cover limited kinds of learning, creates a recipe for disaster where non-tested, yet vital, types of learning are devalued and cut out as a consequence.

While legislation might determine the standards chosen to be tested and the specific format of the tests themselves, whether this is actually the best measure of learning is ultimately up to students and their families to decide as well. We need other approaches available to us to make sure that all students learn and develop to their full potential.

Justice Matters, concerned about the effects of high-stakes testing on the quality of student learning experiences, wanted to learn about how the high-stakes policies were playing out in the classroom and what kind of impact it was having on instructional approaches. While school systems tend to shut out parents and families of color from important educational decisions by not viewing them as educational experts, Justice Matters believes that parents and families are essential decision makers when it comes to how their children are educated and must play a role in shaping educational policy that guides teaching and learning. Gone are the days of bake sales as the main option for parent involvement. Instead parents need to be involved in the teaching of their children and partner with school staff as experts and advocates.

Despite conventional institutional barriers that keep parents of color out of the classroom, Justice Matters brought both parents and teachers to the table to identify concerns about what is happening in the classroom. The discussions we had surfaced serious problems about the state of teaching and learning and warranted action. In order to better understand the depth and breadth of this problem, we decided to gather more information about the impacts of testing and curriculum policies on a district-wide level. Heavily informed by our work with families and teachers in WCCUSD, we decided to create a survey and focus group project that would: 1.) ask teachers across the district how testing and curriculum policies were impacting their students and 2.) engage them in conversation about best practices so that the art of teaching and learning would be student-centered and not test-driven.

## **About the Study and Methodology**

In the winter of 2006 Justice Matters approached United Teachers of Richmond (UTR) with the idea of surveying and conducting focus group with district teachers, and they voted unanimously to work in collaboration with us on the project. They reviewed the survey, provided feedback and 73% of teachers that participated in the survey also participated in a focus group. (Findings from focus groups will be released at a later date.)

The half-hour survey was made up mainly of questions about district testing and curriculum policies and their impact on student learning.

In the spring of 2007, teachers from 25 schools, almost 50% of WCCUSD schools, received the survey. We collected 244 surveys which represented more than 1 in 3 of elementary and middle school teachers surveyed (39% elementary, 38% middle), and more than 1 in 4 high school teachers (26%) in the final pool of participating schools surveyed.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Response rates reflect efforts of schools that continued to participate in the survey project. Two schools, midway through the project, decided to stop participating and are therefore not reflected in the response rate. However, surveys were collected from these schools before they decided to end their participation; these two schools' surveys are incorporated into our findings

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## ABOUT THE SCHOOLS AND THE DISTRICT

	Number of Participating Schools in Survey	Number of schools in entire district
<i>All Schools</i>		
Elementary	15	42
Middle	5	7
High	5	7
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>55</b>
<i>Title I</i>		
Elementary	8	20
Middle	2	3
High	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>25</b>
<i>Program Improvement</i>		
Elementary	5	14
Middle	2	3
High	2	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>9</b>	<b>19</b>

Source: Justice Matters-UTR Teacher Survey 2007

Schools were chosen so as to reflect the diversity of schools in the district with respect to the following categories: School level (elementary, middle and high), school demographics and socio-economic status (racial composition of the school and Title I status), Program Improvement status (whether or not schools have met tests score goals), and feeder patterns (which schools feed into each other).

In order to get a comprehensive understanding of the impacts of testing district-wide we had four major criteria when selecting schools to participate in the survey and focus groups.

### • School Level:

We wanted a balance of elementary, middle, and high schools participating in the project to be similar to the overall balance of each school level in the district. We surveyed 15 elementary schools, 5 middle schools, and 5 high schools.

### • School Demographic and Socioeconomic Status:

We wanted the schools to reflect the economic and racial diversity of the district. Half of these schools were Title I schools, meaning they were schools that served high percentages of low-income families. We also looked at racial demographics when choosing our schools, so that these schools reflect the racial diversity found throughout WCCUSD.

### • Program Improvement:

Within the Title I group of schools, 9 were "Program Improvement," which means they had not met goals for student test scores and were under additional pressure for raising test scores.

### • Feeder Patterns:

We also selected schools that "fed" into each other. In other words, students at the elementary schools we surveyed would move on to attend the middle schools we surveyed, and after this would move on to attend the high schools we surveyed. We wanted to get a comprehensive picture of the impact that testing and curriculum policies have on a student over the course of her or his time in WCCUSD.

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## KEY FINDINGS

### TESTING IS NOT HELPING STUDENTS

### TESTING ENCOURAGES DISCRIMINATION

### MORE INTENSE FOR LOW-INCOME STUDENTS

## Key Findings

### Testing Students is Not Teaching Students

"Children are becoming just numbers.  
Their uniqueness and creativity are being ignored."

-2nd grade teacher at non-Title I school

The test-driven climate forces teachers to rush to cover all the content that might be on the tests and does not allow them time to be truly responsive to student needs and learning. Survey data show that teachers feel they are not able to meaningfully use the assessment results, nor do teachers have adequate time to respond to individual students based on those assessments. This test-driven culture also encourages discriminatory practices. Teachers are encouraged to discriminate by devoting what extra time they have to certain students that are likely to raise test score averages. This negatively impacts those who do not receive the additional attention but are equally deserving of support in their learning. In the middle and high schools, low-income students are more likely to have this test-driven climate hurt the quality of their learning experience.

#### Testing: Not Helping Students Learn

- Three out of four (76%) teachers said that they do not have adequate time to respond to individual students based on what they learn from assessment.
- Even if they had more time to help students, almost half of the teachers (48%) said that, at their school, there is not a process to use the assessment results to meaningfully reflect on the learning progress of students.
- Furthermore, over one quarter (28%) of teachers said that the standardized assessment results are not helpful or can play a negative role in their students' learning.

#### Testing Encourages Discrimination

- 70% of teachers have been directed to give attention to certain students likely to raise test score averages.
- More than half (55%) of teachers said this strategy impacts those students that are not receiving additional attention.

#### Discrimination More Intense for Low-Income Students of Color

Title I schools serve high percentages of low-income families who in WCCUSD are predominantly families of color. The teachers surveyed in the Title I schools faced added pressure to focus on students who could raise school test score results.

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## KEY FINDINGS

- Amongst middle school teachers that are directed to give certain students attention based on scores, 69% are Title I teachers, twice as many as the 31% of non-Title I teachers.
- The California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) is a test that is required for high school graduation even for students who have met all other requirements. High school teachers were asked if they had students taken out of a course they teach to prepare for the CAHSEE. Findings showed that Title I teachers (75%) were three times more likely to have their students taken out of a course than non-Title I teachers (25%).

## TEACHERS ARE FORCED TO CHOOSE

## UNBALANCED EDUCATION

## SINK OR SWIM

### Test Not Helping Students Learn

Not enough time to respond to students based on assessment	76%
No process to use assessment to reflect on student learning	48%
Assessment not helpful or plays negative role for improving student learning	28%

### Testing Encourages Discrimination

Directed to give certain students attention based on test scores alone	70%
Above strategy impacts those students not receiving additional attention	55%

### Discrimination More Intense for Low-Income Students of Color

	Title I	Non-Title I
Middle school teachers directed to give certain student attention based on test scores alone	69%	31%
High school teachers have students taken out to prepare for California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE), the test required to graduate high school despite having met all other requirements	75%	25%

Source: Justice Matters-UTR Teacher Survey 2007

## Mechanical Classrooms for Human Students

"Right now, I feel like I'm forced to choose between instructing my students how to take an assessment, or how to actually think through and solve a problem."

–High school math teacher at Title I school

The drive to perform on tests has ushered in a structure and curricula that foster mechanized teaching approaches and that most teachers feel is not meeting the needs of their students, who are thinking and feeling human beings. Most teachers are saying they are told to structure their day in a way that does not allow them to cover content in depth.

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## KEY FINDINGS

## STUDENTS ARE LEFT BEHIND

In addition, entire core subject areas like science, music, art, and P.E are being cut out of the school day, especially for low-income students, in the interest of preparing students to score well on tests. For students, this is eliminating major areas of knowledge and opportunities to explore and connect to different kinds of learning. The rush to get through test prep curriculum also does not allow time to go back over material students need help with, throwing students into a sink-or-swim reality in the classroom; they either get the material the first time or miss it entirely and get left behind. The objective of teaching has become to get through a checklist of tested standards, not to get students to master content and get a well-balanced education.

### Sink-or-Swim: Get It the First Time or Get Left Behind

- 67% of teachers do not have sufficient time to go back over concepts and skills that students have not yet mastered.

### Elementary Schools Students Denied Science, Art and P.E.

- Three out of four (78%) elementary school teachers said that there are core subject areas such as math, science, art, and physical education that they are not able to teach their students.

- 61% of teachers are not able to cover visual or performing arts and half (52%) of the teachers are not able to cover science. 40% of teachers are not able to cover physical education.

- Eighty two teachers followed up with qualitative responses regarding covering core subjects. More than half (57%) pointed to a lack of time due to district requirements to focus on tested subjects (English language arts and math only).

Schools that Prep for Test Daily	Title I	Non-Title I
All schools	72%	28%
Middle schools	94%	6%
Elementary schools	68%	32%

Teachers that want to use approaches such as arts, one-on-one and student projects

All teachers	62%
Middle school	84%
High school	83%

Source: Justice Matters-UTR Teacher Survey 2007

### Sink-or-Swim

Do not have adequate time to re-teach concepts 67%

### Elementary School Students Denied Science, Art, and P.E.

Not able to cover core subject areas with their class 78%

Not cover visual or performing arts 61%

Not cover science 52%

Not cover physical education 40%

Attributed it to lack of time due to district requirements to focus on tested subjects 57%

### Mechanical Classrooms:

#### What My Students Want—What I Can't Give Them

All teachers 59%

Elementary school teachers 72%

Source: Justice Matters-UTR Teacher Survey 2007

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## KEY FINDINGS

### LACK OF SUPPORT FOR TEACHERS

#### Basics Before Thinking, or Basics With Thinking?

Some people in education believe that students should not be exposed to activities that involve analysis, critical thinking, or creativity until they have mastered basic reading and math skills. The idea is that basics must come before serious thinking.

However, most children who are behind in their basic skills are perfectly capable of analytical and creative thinking. Opportunities to have analytical discussions, conduct science experiments, and write creatively—if done in a skillful way—can significantly speed up their progress in mastering the basics of reading and math.

The most affluent families know this, and they make sure that their children are exposed to rich educational experiences that bring together basic skills with exciting and challenging opportunities to engage in serious thinking. All children deserve the opportunities to learn the basics and to be developed into deep thinkers.

#### Mechanical Classrooms:

#### What My Students Want—What I Can't Give Them

- Teachers were asked about how often they did such classroom activities as lecture, lead class discussions, provide one-on-one support, etc. More than half (59%) of all the teachers, and an even higher percentage of elementary school teachers (72%), do not think the approach to teaching they are having to take is what it should be.

- Of teachers that on a daily basis use “test prep” activities such as using practice tests and other material specifically to get students ready for tests, almost three quarters (72%) are in Title I schools compared to about one quarter (28%) in non-Title I schools. This disparity is even starker amongst middle schools where 94% of the teachers saying that they used test prep activities every day are in Title I schools, and amongst elementary schools, where 68% are in Title I schools.

- In follow-up written responses, nearly two thirds (62%) of teachers said they wanted to foster student learning in other ways such as through visual arts, drama, music, one-on-one attention, student collaboration and projects. This number increases at the middle and high school levels with 84% of middle school teacher responses and 83% of high school teacher responses favoring more of these approaches.

#### Lack of Support for Teachers to Help Their Students Learn

“WCCUSD has diverse groups of students and families. There has been little training in ways in which you can best help families and students learn. Most has been on the use of curriculum which doesn't address the needs of our diverse community”.  
- 3rd grade teacher at Title I school

In most areas, surveyed teachers found that district support was not effective in providing them with the tools they need to help their students learn. Many teachers felt especially unsupported in areas such as curriculum development, working with diverse students and their families, and teaching students that come to their class below grade level.

- Over half of the teachers (55%) do not find that professional development is based on what they need to help students learn.

- Specifically, middle school Title I teachers were the most likely to cite this with 71% believing that professional development is not helping them meet their students' needs versus 29% of non-Title I teachers.

- 60% of teachers did not find professional development effective in two or more of the following areas: meeting a diversity of student learning needs, gaining knowledge for building strong relationships with students and their families, teaching students far below grade level, and effectively teaching students from a variety of cultures and communities.

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## KEY FINDINGS

### ELL STUDENTS DESERVE TO LEARN

### USE MORE GRAPHICS & HANDS-ON TECHNIQUES TO INCREASE FLUENCY

### INTEGRATE HOME LANGUAGES

Professional development not matched to student needs

All teachers - not based on what they need to help students learn	55%	
		Title I    Non-Title 1
Middle school teachers said professional development not based on what they need to help students learn	71%	29%
Not effective in helping them with at least two of the following areas: diversity of student needs, building relationships with families, teaching students from diverse cultures and students coming in below level	60%	

Source: Justice Matters-UTR Teacher Survey 2007

## English Language Learner (ELL) Students Deserve to Learn

"There should be more exciting activities like group work and visual arts, drama, and music done more often. Kids need this to feel successful."

- Middle school science teacher at non-Title I school

In a district with a fast-growing English Language Learner (ELL) student population, many teachers are saying they are not supported in providing their ELL students with a strong curriculum and teaching approach. Too often ELL students are neglected and warehoused in classrooms where teachers do not have the tools to give them what they need. Especially in Title I schools, all teachers most certainly had, have, or will have an ELL student in their classroom that has the same right to learn as their peers. The learning needs of ELL students will soon affect all classrooms and can no longer be marginalized or overlooked.

- Most teachers (85%) believe that it is important to use graphics and hands-on manipulatives, deepen content knowledge, and address various levels of English fluency, but almost half (48%) are not getting support they need to carry out at least two of the above strategies with their ELL students.
- Most (83%) teachers feel it is important to integrate home language and culture into the curriculum yet well over half (58%) do not receive support to do this for their students.

Lack of support for strategies to support English Language Learners (ELL)

Feel it is important to use graphics, deepen content knowledge, and address levels of fluency	85%
Don't get support in two or more of the above areas	48%
Teachers that feel that it is important to integrate home language and culture	83%
Do not get support in above strategy	58%

Source: Justice Matters-UTR Teacher Survey 2007

# Behind the Test Scores: Teaching and Learning Under Arrest

## KEY FINDINGS

### STUDENTS ARE NOT PREPARED BEYOND THE TEST

## What Does It All Add Up To?

"We are dealing with a whole human being; we are forced to focus on two areas, language arts and math."

–3rd grade teacher at Title I school

Teachers are saying that what they are being told to do in the classroom will not prepare students for life beyond the test. The importance of helping students to form independent opinions, problem-solve and develop leadership skills is being lost in the quest for test scores that could not possibly measure these richer forms of learning.

- Over one third of teachers (38%) felt their students would leave their grade level not being able to form independent opinions and conclusions about content area covered.
- 36% of teachers felt their students were unlikely to develop leadership skills.
- At the high school level, 9 times as many teachers in Title I schools (92%) than in non-Title 1 schools (8%) say that students were unlikely to acquire leadership skills.
- More than a quarter of teachers (28%) also felt that their students would leave their grade level unlikely to have developed as engaged and invested learners in the classroom.

## Lack of preparation for students

Students unlikely to form independent opinions and conclusions	38%	
Students unlikely to acquire leadership skills	36%	
	Title I	Non-Title I
High schools students unlikely to acquire leadership skills	92%	8%
Students unlikely to have developed as engaged and invested learners	28%	

Source: Justice Matters-UTR Teacher Survey 2007

# Behind the Test Scores: Teaching and Learning Under Arrest

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### Recommendations: Teaching and Learning Beyond Testing

#### RIGOROUS

Students in WCCUSD deserve everything that is required to gain the tools, experiences, and knowledge necessary for success after high school. Families have the right to expect only the best from their school district and to fight for the vision they have for their schools. What follows are policy principles that the REAL Schools Now! Campaign will use to work with families, teachers, and policy makers in making community vision into education policy that will transform students into masters of their minds and futures.

#### RESPONSIVE

##### Reclaiming the Mechanized Classroom

Students deserve teaching that captures their imaginations and inspires them to succeed in school—in essence, they deserve teaching practices that take advantage of the thirst for knowledge that drives young people everyday.

#### RELEVANT

- Teachers in WCCUSD need the time, training, and tools to be responsive to students' strengths and weak points during the regular school day—speeding through material cheats everyone from mastery.

#### TEACHING

-Students must be provided with deep, unconstrained exploration and guidance in a balanced curriculum in order to build the foundations for their success in and out of school.

Families have untapped knowledge and energy. Bringing down the false wall between schools and families and ending blind drives towards meeting testing benchmarks will not only improve learning conditions for students but will also engender accountability and pride in academic achievement. Test scores sit in computers sending forth a glare that blinds administrators—it's time to put down the spreadsheets and take a look into the eyes of students and their families.

- Those who have the desire and the opportunity to participate in the education of their children at school should be invited inside the classroom—this treasure must be used to transform our classrooms into rich learning centers that mirror the diverse cultures, languages, histories and worldviews of our community.

In the end, students will master curriculum and be prepared to succeed if they receive what they deserve—strong, creative teaching led by supported, well-trained teachers that know their students through academic and community responsiveness.

# Behind the Test Scores: Teaching and Learning Under Arrest

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### TEACH BEYOND SCHOOL WALLS

### SUPPORT CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE ARTS

#### **Beyond the Text Book, Beyond the School Walls: Creating Leaders, Solutions Builders, Peace-fighters, and Life-long Learners**

It has become common for students to go through entire days and weeks in the classroom without reflecting on how the world works. There is no time for questions like, how did my ancestors in Africa and the Americas develop the science used by NASA today? Why does my health depend on physically active play? What can our community do to lessen climate change? Or, how can I share my story through the visual arts? Low-income students of color have the right to know about their past, they have a right to use the scientific knowledge their direct ancestors created and gave the modern world, and they have a right to learn how to collaborate with one another to build solutions for their future.

Today, teachers and families tell us that students are not leaving school with the skills, knowledge, or experiences to ask or answer the questions above. We must not allow our students' minds to be locked up. We must throw open the doors that will allow them to expand their minds and souls in the arts, sciences, and social studies.

- A deep, comprehensive curriculum that covers diverse and important areas of knowledge must be provided to our students, so they can leave school ready to work, be leaders, solution-builders, peace-fighters and life-long learners.

#### **Supporting Bilingual Scholars**

English language learners are not a liability—although often students learning English are treated as such by policies that track them into a narrow curriculum and trajectory through their K-12 years. English language learners are ambassadors of communities that are building an incredible base of cultural, political, social and economic value through language and cultural arts for our society.

- All teachers in WCCUSD teach or will teach students learning English and therefore, there must be a district-wide approach to ensure that support and resources like materials, training, curriculum and time needed to carry out practices that are successful with teaching English learners are provided to schools.

- The diversity among students learning English must be recognized and acted upon in this effort.

# Behind the Test Scores: Teaching and Learning Under Arrest

## RECOMMENDATIONS

### **Supporting our Teachers**

Our vision and principles for improving student learning can only be achieved if teachers are supported and respected by administrators, elected leaders and the community. Teachers go into the profession of teaching with ideals, skills and passion only to be met with restrictions that limit their creativity and sap their drive. They are trained to rigidly implement textbook curriculum while their students call out for teachers that can be creative, responsive and culturally relevant.

-Administrators and the community must work with teachers to identify the support, training and resources needed for teachers to practice professionally and responsively in diverse settings. For this to happen, teachers must be asked what they need—this project serves as an example of that—be treated like professionals, be given time to collaborate with their peers, and be given options.

## SUPPORT TEACHERS

### **Learning from Models at Home and Elsewhere**

There are many wise and skilled people here within our district that have been carrying out the principles described above for years. Justice Matters was able to document some of this work in the teacher focus groups we conducted. Identifying and tapping into our many home-grown resources will be vital to transforming learning for our students.

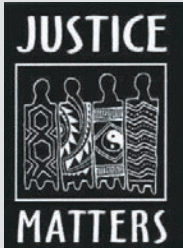
## LEARN FROM SUCCESFUL MODELS

There are also models outside of WCCUSD that we can build on. Justice Matters has studied schools across the country that are providing more than the test-driven climate expects of students—the students, families, teachers, and administrators in these schools are working hard to create authentic learning communities that prepare students to succeed. In a forthcoming Justice Matters-Stanford University report titled High Schools for Equity: Policy Supports for Student Learning in Communities of Color, five California high schools are highlighted that serve as an example of what is possible and provides policy lessons that can be brought to WCCUSD.

## GET INVOLVED WITH US

# Behind the Test Scores: Teaching and Learning Under Arrest

## ABOUT OUR ORGANIZATIONS



## The Organizations that Worked on Survey and Focus Group Project

### Justice Matters

Justice Matters' mission is to bring about racially just schools by developing and promoting education policy rooted in community vision. Such a vision must be rooted in an understanding that low-income communities of color have wisdom, values, and perspectives that contribute a great deal to racially just, high-quality schools. When our school system is shaped by such a vision it makes learning for students of color relevant, meaningful, challenging and supportive in order to prepare them for life.

Principal Staff that Worked on Project:

Olivia E. Araiza, William Romero, Valentina Vélez-Rocha, Susan Sandler  
Consultants: Amy Epstein, Esther Morales, Enrique Valencia  
605 Market Street Suite 1350, San Francisco, CA 94105  
(415) 442-0992  
[www.justicematters.org](http://www.justicematters.org)

### United Teachers of Richmond

The United Teachers of Richmond (UTR) is the exclusive bargaining representative for all WCCUSD certificated employees. UTR is unified with the California Teachers Association and the National Education Association. UTR is the local voice of the United Teaching Profession.

Principal Members and Staff that Worked on Project:

Gail Mendes (President), Shari A. Gray, Paula E. Guaraglia  
700 Crestview Drive, Pinole, CA 94564  
(510) 222-5112

### DataCenter

The DataCenter supports poor and working class people of color-led organizing efforts to reclaim community knowledge and access information in order to strategically utilize research that strengthens the movement for liberation and social justice and dismantles the structural inequities in research.

Principal Staff that Worked on Project:

Saba Waheed  
1904 Franklin Street Suite 900, Oakland, CA 94612  
(510) 835-4692  
[www.datacenter.org](http://www.datacenter.org)

## APPENDIX

### Demographic Information on Teachers That Participated in Survey

#### Teacher Gender and Ethnicity for Survey Participants and District

	Teachers Surveyed	Teachers in WCCUSD district
<b>Gender</b>		
Female	72%	70%
Male	22%	30%
No Answer	6%	--
<b>Ethnicity</b>		
African American	9%	13%
Asian	4%	8%
Filipina/o	3%	4%
Latina/o	7%	9%
Native American	.4%	.4%
White	55%	63%
Multiple/Other		
No Response	22%	3%

#### Teaching Experience for Survey Participants

Total Years Teaching (Career)	Title I	Non-Title 1
1-5 years	72%	28%
6-10 years	67%	33%
11-20 years	46%	54%
21 or more years	38%	62%

#### Years Teaching in WCCUSD

1-5 years	66%	34%
6-10 years	66%	34%
11-20 years	39%	61%
21 or more years	35%	65%

*California Department of Education: Data and Statistics. Data Quest. 2007. <http://dq.cde.ca.gov/dataquest/>*