

Reflections on
“The Impact of High-Stakes Testing
on Student Proficiency in Low Stakes
Subjects

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Why this research is important

- Lots of discussion about school accountability, but almost no attention paid to subjects other than reading and math
- Widespread view of school “gaming” behavior, including teaching to the test
- No attempt elsewhere to understand mechanisms through which accountability could affect low-stakes subjects



Why might science be boosted?

- Accountability might sharpen the lens focused on all aspects of school production
- Learning in reading and mathematics might spill over to other subjects as well



Difficulties in interpretation

- Modest contemporaneous correlation between reading, math and science scores – implications for lagged scores
- No ability to investigate regression to the mean, as can't look at pre-treatment variables or longer term effects
- Sampling restrictions could influence findings – particularly pronounced in low-performing schools?



Things they can do

- Try to measure the degree to which sampling restrictions influence the findings
- Also consider participation rates as a dependent variable as a way of looking at school behavior
- Investigate heterogeneous effects of school grading on student performance
- Consider updating to identify off of change in grading system in 06-07 that includes science



The bottom line

- I'm inclined to believe that science scores were boosted when schools were subject to increased accountability pressure, but causality isn't yet pinned down
- I admire the attempt to understand the mechanism through which this might be working, but it's difficult to make heads or tails of it yet
- Don't lose sight of the fact that the relationships **aren't negative!**

