

Standardized testing: a break down of the american education system

[Education](#), [Learning](#)



The Issue of Standardized Testing

Standardized testing has been used in the American education system for years, and has been used as a source to detect students' learning abilities and teachers' teaching abilities. In 2002, President Bush passed the No Child Left Behind Act, which pushed the idea of standardized testing even further by requiring states to have their third through eighth grade students take a series of math and English tests, and if the schools fail to reach the passing quota, they receive less funding (Mulholland). Because of this act, standardized testing has taken over the education system, in more negatives ways than positive.

I grew up in a Virginia Public School System, and because of this, I have been directly affected by standardized testing. I took my first standardized test in third grade. From then on, standardized testing became the basis of all activities and lesson plans in the classroom. In fourth grade, we began switching for math and English based on our academic ability. However, due to lack of funding, that ended my fifth-grade year. Suddenly I found myself learning in a room of students with different learning capabilities, some learning slower than others, and others faster. The teachers were forced to teach to the bottom students of the class, and as a "smart" student, there were countless days when I doodled in class or was given a coloring page or word search to keep me occupied, and I went home unable to tell my parents what I had learned that day.

I have been increasingly aware of this trend in classrooms in recent years. Teachers have started teaching by the book and only by the book because otherwise, the students don't do as well on these tests and the teacher gets in trouble for it. To prevent themselves from getting in trouble, by using this by-the-book approach to teaching, teachers are promoting a type of teaching which strictly relies on sitting at a desk doing a worksheet, reading, listening, etc. Anyone who has been around a child ten-years-old or younger knows that having a child sit still for over thirty minutes is next to impossible, let alone an entire school day.

In my own experience, I was an assistant in two different preschool classes and was introduced to two approaches to teaching. In both classrooms, I was working with children ages two and three, but both teachers had a different approach to teaching. In one of them, the teacher taught word-for-word from the "standards of learning" booklet that she was given at the beginning of the year. The other teacher relied less on the standards of learning, and more on keeping the children engaged with games, while learning. The effects were astounding. In the by-the-book classroom, the children were already starting to not like coming to school. There were more behavioral problems, and they weren't as excited about learning, which in return, they couldn't retain information as well. In the more creative classroom, the kids came in most days with a smile on their faces, and loved coming to school, and did better on schoolwork because they were learning without realizing that they were learning.

In my opinion, the second, more creative way of teaching is better not only for learning, but two and three-year-olds are not cognitively ready to be thrust into that by-the-book environment yet. For most of them, preschool is the first time they're with a big group of children their own age, in a school setting, away from their parents for a long period of time. Therefore, preschool should be focused more on the social aspect of school, and getting used to it, than being thrown into a true school setting. Preschool really sets the tone for whether or not a student is going to like school, because if they don't, then it is going to be harder for them to learn to like than it is for them to learn to hate it.

In addition, elementary schools were shaped the way they are to get students engaged in different subjects, so that they can have a taste for which subjects they are interested in, and which they do not care for. My elementary school, for example, was set up so that we had time each set aside for history, science, math, and language arts, and then every day we switched to centers, which alternated depending on the day and included: computers, library, art, music, guidance, and P. E. Now, because standardized testing primarily focuses on math and reading, schools have put more of a focus on those two subjects than all of the others (Mulholland). Tim walker found that, " In a 2011 national survey, two-thirds of teachers said many academic subjects had been crowded out by an increased focus on math and language arts. About half said art and music were being marginalized, while 40 percent said the same for foreign languages; 36 percent for social studies; and 27 percent for science. The results were

particularly striking at the elementary level, where 81 percent of teachers reported that extra time devoted to math or language arts meant less time for other subjects," (Walker). This, again, is a problem because some students just aren't as good at math than others. Some students are better at history, some at science, some at music, however, the standardized testing system is set up in a "one-size-fits-all" type of system (Walker). This means that children are all forced to know math concepts and reading concepts, and if they're not they're seen as not as smart as the others. A child should be praised for what they're good at, not put down because one subject doesn't come as easy to them than others.

A lot of stress comes along with this one-size-fits-all way of teaching. For teachers, this comes in terms of having less say in what they can teach, but for kids, this comes in terms of testing. The testing environment is hostile. If a child is confused on how a question is worded, the teacher, or proctor can't help them, all they can do is tell them to reread the question, or take a guess. The tests can take hours, the room is completely silent, and the questions seems endless. It's hard enough for a child to sit still for a classroom lesson, but even harder for a nerve-wracking test. One Ohio fifth teacher described a traumatic experience of one of her students having a mental breakdown during one standardized test due to the stress, and she said, "She had a complete meltdown, and I could do nothing to help her, I couldn't help her with the test. I could just let her take a little break then, but then she was going to run out of time, and she was watching the clock, she knew," (Mulholland). The same teacher showed her class a practice test and

asked the students to write down their reactions to it, and one child wrote, “ I feel like we have to take all these tests and if I pass the tests I like and if I don’t, I die,” (Mulholland). Teachers are supposed to be there for students, help them in any way possible, and make sure they’re learning everything they can, but because of these standardized tests, teachers are unable to fulfill their duties.

In conclusion, standardized testing is breaking down the American Education System. In a nation that prides itself on its diversity, and freedom, it is not fair that small children are forced to focus on two subjects. As a drama teacher in Iowa describes, “ We’re robbing our students of the joy and adventure of learning,” (Walker). The results of this cause students to not want to pursue learning, even though there could be a whole variety of subjects that interest them, but the subjects that may really matter to them aren’t seen as important by the state. Children should be excited to go to school, eager to learn, but instead, their voices aren’t being heard because all that’s being heard from them is whether or not they passed the latest standardized test. In addition, the truly passionate teachers are being stripped of their ability to teach and help their students.