

Living up to the standards

Business



The only sound in the room is the click of the teacher's heels as she allocates answer sheets for the standardized tests to every student. The little bubbles for the multiple-choice questions swim before your eyes, and you pray that you will not mark the wrong answers solely because of that. The assessments have a narrow range that only tests math and language arts, and you are not sure that they truly help anyone, especially when they make everyone so apprehensive that they feel as if they will vomit.

Regrettably, these tests are what often determine a child's entire educational future. Of course, the supposed major asset of standardized testing is that it supposedly boosts student achievement; however, the instillation of extreme stress in students, lack of cognitive thinking and limited focus involved, and lack of evidence of solid student achievement all prove that today's standardized tests have become obsolete and need to be replaced with progressive testing. Essentially, standardized testing induces extreme stress in students, which negatively impacts their education. According to education researcher Gregory J. Cizek, there are a plethora of anecdotes " illustrating how testing..

. produces gripping anxiety in even the brightest students, and makes young children vomit or cry, or both." Of course, students will always be stressed about assessments, and, in a healthy amount, this nervousness can motivate students and increase performance levels. However, the extreme emphasis on standardized testing and its enormous importance in a child's entire educational future have caused stress levels to cross this threshold and raise disturbingly. On March 14, 2002, the Sacramento Bee reported that " test-related jitters, especially among young students, are so common that the

Stanford-9 exam comes with instructions on what to do with a test booklet in case a student vomits on it.” How can our education system claim that standardized testing improves education when there is concrete evidence that it is detrimental to students’ basic health? This intense strain on students is quite unhealthy, and can only impede achievement.

It is obvious that standardized testing is increasing student tension in amounts that are, frankly, absolutely preposterous, and certainly not conducive to creating a positive, healthy environment in which students can perform their best and learn, which is, after all, the sole purpose of school. Moreover, standardized testing narrows focus down to the few subjects that are being tested, and reduces the time spent on other subjects that are an important part of school, such as science, social studies, the arts, and physical education. Instead of learning these invaluable subjects, students are often subjected to monotonous test preparation for the tested subjects, and this is adversely influencing students everywhere. A five-year University of Maryland study completed in 2007 found “ the pressure teachers were feeling to ‘ teach to the test [stops]... [the] teaching [of] higher-order thinking, ...the amount of time spent on complex assignments, and...the actual amount of high cognitive content in the curriculum.” Some may argue that “ teaching to the test” is beneficial for education because it hones in on essential content and skills; however, this kind of limited focus hinders children from becoming well-rounded, and this kind of narrow thinking prevents students from understanding the world around them, instead confining them to a maximum of two subjects, and ultimately dooming them

when they decide that they do not want to fill in multiple-choice questions about math and English for a living.

A 2010 College of William & Mary study found Americans' scores on the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking have been dropping since 1990, and researcher Kyung-Hee Kim lays part of the blame on the increase in standardized testing: "If we neglect creative students in school because of the structure and the testing movement... then they become underachievers." Finally, standardized testing does not boost student achievement. After No Child Left Behind (NCLB) passed in 2002, the US slipped from 18th in the world in math on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) to 31st place in 2009, with a similar drop in science and no change in reading. On May 26, 2011, National Research Council report found no evidence test-based incentive programs are working: "Despite using them for several decades, policymakers and educators do not yet know how to use test-based incentives to consistently generate positive effects on achievement and to improve education." Furthermore, while many believe that the excessive focus on certain core subjects boosts student intelligence levels, this has been proven to be an ineffective method. Jiang Xuegin, Deputy Principal of Peking University High School, explained that China displaced Finland at the top of the 2009 PISA rankings because "Chinese schools are very good at preparing their students for standardized tests. For that reason, they fail to prepare them for higher education and the knowledge economy." China is trying to depart from the "drill and kill" test prep that Chinese educators admit has only produced "competent mediocrity." In sum, rigorously preparing children for standardized tests is

akin to teaching a parrot to talk - no one ends up much smarter, and no one knows how to properly apply knowledge.