The standards for standardized testing: how do we measure up?

Business

As students, the pressure to excel in school is great. It is further exacerbated by standardized testing. While these stress-inducing tests claim to measure student’s intellectual abilities and progress, they are not often reliable indicators of a one’s full intellectual potential. As early as 3rd Grade, many students are faced with tedious preparation for state issued standardized tests. Teachers and students alike feel the need to score very high on these tests in order to reflect well upon themselves and their school. As a result, teachers end up “ teaching to the test.

” This method of teaching forces teachers to speed through topics and, in the process, they take creativity and enjoyment out of the learning process. Standardized tests are often scored on a curve, making their measurements of intelligence less reliable. Often, when a majority of students in a class or school do poorly on a standardized test, the test will be scored using an upward curve. This undermines the credibility of a standardized test’s measurement of intelligence if the scoring is skewed to make it appear as though students are doing better than they actually are. In New York City, many students were performing poorly on standardized tests. As a result, the state lowered their standards.

They made the tests easier, so that more students could do better. Are the students actually becoming more proficient? No, the tests have simply been made easier, giving parents and government officials the satisfaction of thinking that students are improving. Test scores are not necessarily good indicators of true intelligence. The SAT is a looming presence during our high school careers. This “ infamous” test often tells us less about the intellectual

ability of an individual student, than the amount preparation the student has made prior to the test.

According to annual statistics from the College Board, students from higher income families tend to score above the mean on their SATs. This is likely due to the fact that their parents can pay for more tutoring and test prep than lower income families. These statistics indicate that wealth plays a significant role in how well students perform on standardized tests. The SAT tests our ability to analyze and answer questions about various reading passages, our vocabulary, our writing and grammar skills, as well as our ability to solve logic and math problems. At least that is what is claimed. If only the test rewarded us for being good readers and writers.

In reality, the test aims to trap and trick even the most intelligent students into picking incorrect answers by using British spelling and grammar or sentences that sound wrong, but are, in fact, correct. The College Board purposefully makes the passages long and tedious so that the students' attention wander and they don't grasp much of the critical information. Clearly, the SATs are not a good indicator of raw intellectual potential. As human beings, we are unique individuals and no two people learn in the same way or have equal strength in the same area. Standardized tests measure intelligence as though people were uniform in their learning styles and intellectual capacities. Although standardized testing is not a good indicator of intellectual potential, it does provide a clear academic structure for teachers and students to follow.

Teaching with a particular test in mind dictates what teachers should teach and when they should teach it. Despite its various shortcomings, the use of standardized testing can do some good for our educational system. From a relatively young age, we have to face the stringent demands of academia and standardized testing. The pressure to achieve the highest score possible can be very taxing for young people, often causing great emotional distress. By, taking the joy out of learning and replacing it with an unhealthy obsession for high standardized test scores may come at the cost of our emotional well-being and intellectual creativity.