

A look at the effects of standardized testing



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Standardized testing in schools has long been a controversial method of measuring success and readiness. Such tests are claimed to be important indicators of not only student achievement and aptitude, but also the effectiveness of teaching done by teachers and parents. However, some standardized test scores have proven that tests that have been put into place to help prepare children for the next academic phase in their lives, are no longer determining or being used for their original intentions. Although standardized testing is widely used across the nation, the negative impacts on teachers, parents, and students far outweigh the positive results that they are commonly thought to bring.

When most people think of standardized testing, one or two tests during elementary school and one or two more during high school may come to mind. They don't realize that these types of tests start in the pre-kindergarten years and do not end until one's senior year of high school. Based on information given by the South Carolina State Department of Education website, during four-year-old and five-year-old kindergarten, the Phonological Awareness Literacy Screening (PALS) test and the Kindergarten Readiness Assessment (KRA) test are given twice a year to measure overall placement before beginning the school year and to determine readiness for the child to move on further. A Gifted and Talented assessment is given to children in the second grade to determine advanced placement throughout the rest of their years in primary school. When children reach the third grade, the SCREADY and SCPASS is administered in the areas of English Language Arts and Mathematics. For grades four through eight, the SCREADY and SCPASS is administered with alternation between the subjects

of Science for grades four, six, and eight, and Social Studies for grades five and seven. During high school, each child is required to take an End-of-Course exam for Algebra 1, English 1, Biology 1, US History and the Constitution and the English 2 field test, along with the Career Readiness Assessment (R2W), all which are courses that have to be taken in order to graduate. The SAT and ACT also have to be taken through the midst of these for the ability to apply to college in the future(“ Test Dates”).

After a comprehensive survey was completed in the some of the nation’s largest districts, it was discovered that a typical student takes 112 mandated standardized tests between their pre-kindergarten years and the time they reach their senior year of high school(Layton). One major effect that standardized tests clearly bring out are the negative perceptions that children and students gain about themselves when a score is not suitable enough. They begin to lose their sense of being able to do well in school, and often times would rather give up than continue to try. This is also apparent when tests are scored in areas of proficient and not-proficient, because students then begin to compare themselves to others and ultimately become unappreciative of their own capabilities(Gere). Looking at it from a different perspective, standardized testing continues to place children into a training process. Students learn to make the grade and reach a certain score, instead of gaining lasting knowledge. This cycle is now becoming one of the main causes of high stress levels for students of all ages because as they reach the next grade level, oftentimes they have forgotten the base knowledge needed to understand and complete the material that will be on the next test.

In addition to students, teachers also are becoming demoralized by standardized tests. “ The problem today is that teachers are trapped in a broken system- a system that forces them to prepare for the tests being given to their students, and then further holds them accountable for the results that the students receive” (Cox). This system is the big reason that our teachers’ creative educating styles have ultimately been taken away, and resulted in the focus of every classroom discussion being about an upcoming test. Teachers went to school to get a degree to have the chance and opportunity to open students’ minds, and introduce them to concepts that will develop them into who they want to become over time, not just to teach them what they need to know to get a certain score on a test. A phone survey of teachers ranging from pre-kindergarten to twelfth grade performed by researchers at the National Education Association, established that the majority of teachers, nearly seventy five percent, felt a considerable amount of pressure to improve test scores for the upcoming years, while nearly the same amount saw a negative impact on the classroom from trying to squeeze out the vast majority of the curriculum that is actually engaging and entertaining to the students. It was also reported that almost thirty percent of all classroom time was spent on some sort of test-related task, including preparation, proctoring and monitoring of the actual test taking place, and reviewing the results of each individual student from the standardized test (Walker). Ultimately, the amount of time that has to be dedicated to standardized tests in themselves is narrowing the curriculum so much, that things such as music, art, and foreign languages that at one-point students were taking as a passion, are now being taken out of elementary schools (Gere).

From the outside looking in, parents play a big role in recognizing the negative effects that come along with standardized testing. Parents often look at testing as a way to create school rankings, rather than portraying their child's originality. These tests are seen as a just a "one-size-fits-all" assessment by parents, allowing them to see their child's progress and areas of improvement, but not actually portraying their achievement (Bermudez). In a study performed by the Education Post, the results from the question "Are standardized tests fair?" came back with answers almost divided completely in half with some leaning towards yes and some leaning towards no. Overall though, forty nine percent of parents decided that their children are being required to take too many tests, ultimately taking away from other things that go on in their daily lives (Camera). Students often bring home the stress that is put on them at school, thus causing their parents additional issues to handle. They see first-hand how overwhelmed their children are, usually causing more pressure to be put on them to help their child succeed. This pressure often puts further stress not only on the children, but on the other members of the family as well.

On the other hand, there are many people, particularly school and government officials, that believe standardized testing is a positive thing. The biggest reason behind this belief is that standardized tests are a measure of effectiveness (Phelps). Teachers can see which areas their students struggle in, students can identify their strengths and weaknesses, parents can determine the quality of education their child is receiving, and school leaders can determine which subjects need more attention, all based off of the overall scores made. One of the biggest advocates of standardized

testing is the No Child Left Behind act written under the leadership of George W. Bush in the year 2002. The act ultimately holds schools accountable for student learning outcomes through the use of adequate yearly progress. When forming the act, the idea behind it was that progress from state to state could easily be compared. There was a level playing field for everyone, allowing a fair assessment of student success from all over the United States. It also was a promise made to close the long-standing achievement gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students in the United States by using the results from standardized testing (Abernathy).

Although there are some ways to view standardized testing as a positive impact on the lives of students having to take them, the negative effects that they place on not only the lives of students, but parents and teachers too, are crucial to the learning environment that we are placed in today. These negative effects far outweigh any positives that may occur as a result. Standardized testing will probably always be in occurrence due to the society we live in today, but to better the children in the generations to come, we should consider the negative effects and make the necessary efforts to bring about changes that reduce them.

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