

The effectiveness of the standardized tests



Education has always been an issue in everyday life, and continues today to be very important. The effectiveness of statewide testing has been under much discussion as President Bush has made education a top priority in his administration. In my opinion however, the method used in Texas, TAAS testing, is not effective and should not be implemented nationwide because this method pressures teachers to teach specifically toward the test, specifically encouraging memorization and not learning, cramming knowledge for the TAAS, and rearranging school schedules to have time allotted specifically for TAAS reviews.

First of all, school districts in Texas are evaluated on how well their school's TAAS results are, thus urging teachers to repeatedly go over the same topics so the students are "assured" of passing TAAS. This results in students not learning the subject, but instead, memorizing. This method is great for short term, but often they review questions that might be asked on the test, then six months later the child forgets. For example, math teachers often teach how to work a specific "TAAS related" problem, rather than making sure students fully understand the total math concept. This can be very detrimental to the student's comprehension and to other subjects they may take later in their school career.

Furthermore, it seems that teachers have to cram as much knowledge as possible to cover certain test areas. Rather than exploring a wide variety of subjects and gaining as much knowledge as possible, the teachers must cram knowledge of certain subjects, knowing it will be part of the TAAS test. They perhaps have students at different levels and learning abilities, but often the brighter students are held back from learning more, until the

slower students catch on and catch up to the entire class. This inhibits the gifted or talented students progress and they tend to be negatively impacted.

Finally, the time factor must also be considered. Because so much emphasis is put on the TAAS test, it impacts class schedules. For example, teachers at my school have three days of the week devoted to TAAS preparation.

Without having statewide testing, these days could be eliminated and other important topics could be learned. Rather than teaching students new information, often class time is taken up reviewing TAAS test questions.

Although this class time may be beneficial to students struggling to pass the TAAS, those who do not need the help are wasting valuable learning time.

As the saying goes, "The mind is a terrible thing to waste," yet this seems to be what we are doing. We are teaching our students how to test, reviewing subjects redundantly, and teaching in such a way that bores even the average student. When time is spent on TAAS skills that a student has already mastered, it is literally a waste of time and talent. I hope that your state will consider doing the right thing, by not mandating statewide testing. Surely there are other ways we can evaluate our school systems and not put students in jeopardy or being held back from the joys of learning new information and our teachers from exploring new and exciting methods of encouraging students to learn.