

Standardized testing: not the correct answer

[Business](#)



I sit in a room with about thirty other students. The air is tense with apprehension and stress, and the only sounds are the scratching of pencils against paper, the clicking of fingers against calculator buttons, and the occasional tapping or coughing. I glance up at the clock and, realizing I have only seven minutes left with twelve questions to go, quickly turn my attention back to the booklet and answer sheet that lie forebodingly on my desk. I read the question again: "If a and b are integers greater than 100 such that $a + b = 300$, which of the following could be the exact ratio of a to b ? (A) 9 to 1 (B) 5 to 2 (C) 5 to 3 (D) 4 to 1 (E) 3 to 2". I know that I know how to do this, but I just cannot seem to wrap my mind around the question. I sigh, knowing there is no way I can finish all the questions in time, and set to work moving my pencil against my cluttered sheet of scratch paper. This is now just a competition between me, my pencil, the clock, and my future. It is nearly impossible to be a student in one of today's public school systems and not to have at some point encountered a standardized test. Since the creation of the College Board all the way back in 1900, and the fairly recently initiated No Child Left Behind Act, there has been a dramatic increase in student testing throughout the country. More than 100 million standardized tests are administered each year, and the College Board's SAT, PSAT, and AP testing programs, along with the ACT and state-issued tests, have been taken by hundreds of thousands of students throughout the years. Along with these tests has come much controversy over their legitimacy and value, especially as they begin to take over our school systems and education in general.

Judging from my own personal experience, research, and common sense, I stand firm in the belief that standardized tests should not be administered to students as an evaluative tool, as they are neither effective nor beneficial. The looming pressure of testing takes away a teacher's ability to effectively teach, transforming school into mere test prep rather than actual learning. One may argue that the pressure of testing and scoring motivates a student to learn more and study harder, and also pushes teachers to teach students more effectively. However, it is evident that teachers are not motivated by material that they are not passionate about teaching, and this lack of interest takes its toll on the students he or she instructs. The motivation to do well merely to get a good score on a test is not what school should be about, and does not help children to grow up loving to learn. One of the largest arguments in favor of standardized testing is that some tests, namely the SAT, are easier for colleges and administrators and help make it easier for students to apply to multiple schools.

It is also claimed that these tests assist college admissions officers in deciding whom to admit to their schools. However, common sense should tell us that no college should judge the intellectual promise of a student by numbers and relative test scores. These cannot give an accurate picture of any human being, and a number can never portray intelligence. A growing issue that has been gaining more and more media attention is the bias that exists within the questions and formatting of these tests, non-deliberately favoring certain ethnic and economic groups. For the class of 2002, white students scored an average of 1060 (out of 1600), while the average for black students was 857 and for hispanics, 900.

These relatively large gaps point to some fault in the test, and have caused much debate and tension. Even as the racial issue starts being taken care of, one must not forget about the disadvantage economically challenged students are placed in. Just the other day I received an advertisement in the mail for an SAT prep course. It promised an increase of at least 200 points on the overall test score, and featured glowing testimonials from past students. Out of curiosity, I glanced on the back, and scanned it over until my eyes came to a halt at the " Cost" section. The price for the SAT prep course was a whopping \$1300, while a course for just one subject test was \$250.

This is just ridiculous for a test that is supposed to see how well students " think, solve problems and communicate." As this course is not far different from other prep courses, it shows the clear advantage that the wealthy have in their ability to prepare for the test. The No Child Left Behind act, which was put into effect in 2001, established a " test and punish" approach to education that was supposed to weed out ineffective teachers while improving the quality of schools. This act has been met with enormous controversy and protest, has very high disapproval ratings, and 30% of schools have failed to make " adequate yearly progress." Evidently, there is much justification for frustration about standardized testing. But no one should despair; there are methods to work towards the reform or abolition of standardized testing.

Most notable is Fair Test: The National Center for Fair and Open Testing. It provides much information about the problems with standardized testing, and there one can find ways to organize groups and protests and sign petitions. It also informs of ways to educate others about all the unpleasant

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aspects of the No Child Left Behind act. But no matter what state we are in now, remember: it is possible for America's students and teachers to one day no longer have to deal with the unfairness of standardized testing.