

What can be done regarding standardized testing?

Terms

- Standardized testing – A test where the test takers are given the same or a selection of questions from a common bank of questions and they scored based on a set standard.
- Standard - an idea or thing used as a measure, norm, or model in comparative evaluations
- Controlled Conditions – The setting in which the test is taken is very strict on what can and cannot be used during the test, what can be out or visible, and maintain silence.
- Aptitude – Natural ability to do a task.
- Industrial Revolution – The transition in American from being a primarily agrarian and handicraft economy to rapidly producing technology and moving towards industry.
- High School – The years of school including 9th through 12th grade.
- Middle School – The years of school including 6th through 8th grade.
- Elementary School – Years of schooling including 1st through 5th grade.
- National Education Association (NEA) – An organization representing education professionals that aims to ensure every student is prepared with enough knowledge from their schooling
- School Ranking – Schools are ranked in each state based on how well their students scored on standardized tests

Analyze the Problem

History of the Problem

- 1840-1875 written exams were created for the first time
- Before 1861 educators began using mandated exams to assess student's knowledge in curriculum to aid in administrative decisions.
- In 1890 Harvard President Charles William Eliot proposed standard entrance exams for college
 - This came into practice in 1900 when the College Education Board was established and implemented 9 different subject tests across the country
- The US military developed aptitude focused tests during World War 1 called army mental tests which were used to assign servicemen jobs during the war
- 1914 - The National Education Association endorsed standardized testing
- By 1920 the World Book and the Stanford Achievement Test sold 2.5 million copies, standardized testing overtook the nation
- 1935 – the computer created electronic data processing which allowed tests to be evaluated at a faster rate and the price to administer a test fell.
- 1965 The Elementary and Secondary Education Act creates an increase in tests based on norms to evaluate student's knowledge
- 2001 – No Child Left Behind act created education reform that mandated standardized testing to assess school performance, students now take standardized tests every year.
 - “One size fit all” approach
- 2000s, tests like the SATs, ACTs, and Advanced Placement become extremely popular and necessary for practically every college

How widespread is the problem?

- 77% of elementary teachers believe standardized tests are not developmentally appropriate

- 75% of middle school teachers
 - 58% of high school teachers
- The Northwest Evaluation Association conducted a survey in 2016 that found 70% of teachers believe that focus on high stakes tests take away instructional time
-

Causes

- The No Child Left Behind Act
 - Instituted in 2002 until 2015
 - Aimed to improve education for students of color, students of color, student who need special education and those who speak no or limited English
 - Used annual testing to evaluate and set improvement targets based on scores
 - Schools who failed to improve could be subject to penalties such as requiring an improvement plan up to closing a struggling school or firing its staff
- The Industrial Revolution
 - When society focused on educating people to work, they began implementing testing practices to evaluate how prepared they were for the work force
- Technological Advancements such as computers allowed for standardized tests to be produced and evaluated at a faster rate allowing for a mass increase in their use

Effects

- Tests fail to consider students who do not test well or have academic skills outside of the ones being tested on
- Reading, writing, and math are emphasized on the tests and therefore other subjects like history, art, and electives aren't valued as highly despite being equally important
- Tests are used for evaluation of students and eventually used to determine college acceptance therefore a lot of unnecessary pressure is put on the students. This can affect their performance on the test and their mental health.
- American Psychological Association conducted a survey in 2014 on ages 13-17 regarding stress levels
 - Students experiencing levels of stress way above what is considered healthy and higher than an average adult's reported amount of stress
 - 83% said school was a cause of stress
 - 69% said getting into a good college
 - Experience physical and psychological symptoms of stress
 - 36% reported nervousness/anxiety
 - 31% reported being overwhelmed
 - 30% reported feeling sad or depressed
- Because teachers are evaluated on how well their students test, they are inclined to "teach the test" rather than an overarching curriculum which would be more beneficial in the long run.
- If teacher effectiveness is evaluated using test scores, overall successful teachers may be criticized if their students didn't do well on the test. On the other hand, deficiencies may be overlooked if a teacher's students scored well.
- Basing decisions on standards doesn't allow students to be taught to their individual academic needs

Who is harmed?

- Students that learn slower or have strong skills in other school subjects may fail the tests and their strong academic capabilities are not reflected.
- Teachers are assessed on how well their students do
 - Margaret Pastor, PhD, Principal of Stedwick Elementary School in Maryland noticed that 1 of 4 kindergarten classes scored low and another very high. When the superintendent went to speak to the lower scoring it teacher it was the same teacher.
 - DC and 16 states have stopped using tests to evaluate teacher performance
- Girls tend to score lower on multiple choice and higher on open ended and vice versa for boys
 - Sean Reardan conducted a study by Stanford in 2018 that found that testing format accounts for 25% of different scores between genders in reading in math
- Poor communities score disproportionately lower on standardized tests because the tests focus on information in textbooks. Poor districts can't afford textbooks and teachers teach based on the curriculum required by the district.
 - 79% percent of students in Philadelphia are eligible for lunch and their graduation rate is only 64%
 - Less than half scored proficient or above in the PSSAs of 2013

What methods currently exist to manage the problem?

- 2015 – Every Student Succeeds Act is passed which takes steps to reduce standardized testing, but statewide tests are still required for grades 3 through 8.
 - First time that high quality education is required to ensure students are prepared for college and careers.
 - More funding is supplied for innovations in Promise Neighborhoods
 - Promised neighborhoods are neighborhoods where the government is working to improve the infrastructure of underprivileged neighborhoods
- 2012 Obama allowed flexibility under the No Child Left Behind Act in exchange for detailed plans to improve quality of instruction, close achievement gaps and increase equity

Standards/Criteria

Our solution should...

- reduce the number of standardized tests and reduce evaluating schools' performance based on scores
- stop punishment for low scoring and instead implement reform in the low scoring districts
- Diversify subjects being tested upon to encourage a wide range of knowledge

Possible Solutions (5-10)

- Stop testing students every year of school. Instead, a general exam covering basic foundations of knowledge that all students should know at a certain age
 - Testing should be first implemented in fifth grade, then in eighth, and finally in twelfth grade.
 - This does not include basic state subject testing such as Keystone Exams.
- Subject Testing, such as the biology and English Keystone Exams, should be extended to include subjects such as art and history to encourage a range of knowledge. This also allows students who have skills in differing areas of school to represent their academic strengths.

- Districts that tend to score lower should be investigated on why they did so
 - Often this includes their economic status as these students do not have the same access to material that wealthier districts do
- Testing could be customized to districts so that the students are being tested to the curriculum their teachers are required to provide rather than on standards based nationwide
- School funding should not be a factor that is considered based on how well a school does on a test. Taking away funding is going to do more harm than good. Instead, a learning plan should be implemented by the district to encourage growth.

Works Cited

- Association, National Education. "History of Standardized Testing in the United States." *NEA*, <https://www.nea.org/professional-excellence/student-engagement/tools-tips/history-standardized-testing-united-states>.
- Broussard, Meredith. "Why Poor Schools Can't Win at Standardized Testing." *The Atlantic*, Atlantic Media Company, 21 Aug. 2015, <https://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/07/why-poor-schools-cant-win-at-standardized-testing/374287/>.
- Christina, Simpson. *Christina Simpson Harvard Graduate School of Education May 2016*. May 2016, https://projects.iq.harvard.edu/files/eap/files/c._simpson_effects_of_testing_on_well_being_5_16.pdf.
- "Effects of Standardized Testing on Students & Teachers: Key Benefits & Challenges." *Effects of Standardized Testing on Students & Teachers* | American University, 2 July 2020, <https://soeonline.american.edu/blog/effects-of-standardized-testing>.
- "Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)." *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)* | U.S. Department of Education, <https://www.ed.gov/essa>.
- Lee, Andrew M I. "What Is No Child Left behind (NCLB)?" *Understood*, 4 May 2021, <https://www.understood.org/en/articles/no-child-left-behind-nclb-what-you-need-to-know>.
- ProCon.org. "Standardized Testing Pros and Cons - Does It Improve Education?" *Standardized Tests*, 17 Feb. 2022, <https://standardizedtests.procon.org/>.
- Walker, Tim. "Survey: 70 Percent of Educators Say State Assessments Not Developmentally Appropriate." *NEA*, <https://www.nea.org/advocating-for-change/new-from-nea/survey-70-percent-educators-say-state-assessments-not>.