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## The Unseen Role of Standardized Testing in Equalizing Opportunities

In an era where many colleges have adopted a test-optional policy, it's crucial to reconsider the role of standardized tests. Far from mere relics of an outdated educational system, these tests can be vital tools in bridging educational disparities. Here's why teachers and parents must encourage their students to embrace these exams.

Although many colleges and universities have become test-optional, teachers and parents should advocate for students to study and take standardized exams. When teachers express skepticism about the fairness or effectiveness of standardized exams, they may perpetuate inequality. Well-off students often have parents who underscore the importance of SAT or ACT scores and encourage enrollment in AP classes. Conversely, for students from low-income families, where families have lower rates of post-secondary education, a teacher's critical stance might be the only perspective they hear, inadvertently limiting their educational aspirations.

Consider this: The lowest 20 percent of households by income hold 5 percent bachelor's degrees while the top 20 percent hold 40 percent. Would the perception of a rigged system encourage you to spend hours studying? As a former teacher, I've witnessed students from the lowest quintile excel in AP classes, study diligently for the SAT, and get accepted to the nation's most elite universities. The system is imperfect, but standardized testing is a stepping stone, not a barrier.

One of the primary benefits of standardized tests is identifying what content is most important. By using tests to instruct what's essential, teachers can put their personality and passion toward other meaningful activities and lessons. They also provide a clear benchmark for what students should be able to understand and apply, a critical factor in ensuring a consistent educational standard across varied schooling environments. AP Teachers can accept syllabi provided by the College Board that detail all necessary learning objectives.

Furthermore, standardized tests help keep teachers accountable. In my experience teaching several AP courses, analyzing how students perform these tests is invaluable. Teachers can look at content areas where students scored lower than state or national averages or prior years. It helps teachers identify what topics require more teaching time for future sections. This continuous feedback loop is essential for improving the quality of education.

The legitimacy of assessment is another critical aspect where standardized tests excel. In a time where technology can enable students to complete assignments with little cognitive effort, standardized tests in a controlled environment ensure a fair and accurate measure of student knowledge and skill. While projects and writing assignments provide growth opportunities, this is especially critical in maintaining the integrity of academic achievements.

Standardized tests reflect students' ability with more accuracy than grade point averages (GPAs), which can vary significantly between schools. This consistency is crucial for leveling the playing field, especially for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. By providing a common standard, [standardized tests enable colleges to assess the potential of all students fairly and equitably](#).

Despite these benefits, testing scores aren't without their flaws. They don't fully assess teacher effectiveness and may [not always motivate students who don't see a direct personal benefit](#). The interconnection between scores and funding have even led some [staff to cheat on behalf of students](#). The strongest arguments against standardized testing cite [its racist origins and racially unequal outcomes](#), including bias in test forms and content.

The National Education Association (NEA) advises testing provides “[authentic assessments that reflect the broad range of students learning and skills, including creativity, leadership, critical thinking, and collaboration](#).” While the qualities espoused by NEA are essential, tests don't quantify them well. Applications and letters of recommendation paint a more complete picture of a graduate. Tests exist to show knowledge and skill attainment objectively.

However, despite these valid concerns, standardization remains the most effective means to evaluate students for higher education. Today, many universities facilitate meetings to address unprecedented student unpreparedness, low retention, and diminishing enrollment. Many students are uncertain that their effort in school has any payoff. Standardized tests allow colleges to assess student aptitude better. They help students market themselves to universities and [attain scholarships](#). While imperfect, these standardized tests remove uncertainty from higher education and motivate educational rigor in the high school setting.

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