

from members

Sridevi Dukvasula
Phoenix, AZ



Standardized tests are the first indicators of relative performance in a group.

Robert Freewalt
Camby, IN



You need a common, uniform testing system to compare performance.

Susan J. Kent
San Diego, CA



These tests cover all the main elements of an academic year in each class from first through 12th grade.

MEDIA BAKERY

NO from members

Joe Young
Erie, CO



If children are taught how to take tests and merely repeat information, how does that demonstrate a true understanding of the content?

Kelly Shaine
Southlake, TX



These are average teaching standards [and] do not benefit kids that are either above or below average.

Dustin Miller
Burien, WA



Standardized tests are not a measure of overall intelligence on a given subject, but rather how well you are prepared for taking the said test.

Are standardized tests a fair measure of student achievement?

STANDARDIZED TESTS HAVE been debated since the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 and the No Child Left Behind Act of 2002. These multiple-choice tests are used to evaluate students' academic performance and eligibility for college or university.

Critics say that standardized tests don't measure problem-solving skills and encourage teachers to "teach to the test" rather than provide a well-rounded education. They allege that standardized tests also encourage cheating, since teachers and schools whose students score well on these tests tend to benefit.

Supporters say the tests have a positive effect on student achievement; they are nondiscriminatory because they ensure content is equivalent for all students, and they prevent students from advancing from grade to grade even when their performance does not merit this. They add that standardized test scores are trustworthy if responsible external authorities control their administration.

What do you think?

Find out more about this topic on the Web:

- www.hoover.org (search: "Stop the war against standardized tests")
- www.voxxi.com (search: "standardized testing debate")
- www.education.com (search: "standardized testing")

from an expert in the field



Richard P. Phelps is the founder of the *Nonpartisan Education Review* and the author of *The Effect of Testing on Student Achievement: 1910-2010* (International Journal of Testing, 2012; not available at Costco).

STANDARDIZED testing may be the most useful evaluation method available for human-resource-intensive endeavors. It provides decision-makers with information available from no other source.

Decades of research comparing the consistency of different teachers' evaluations of identical student work with that of standardized tests have found much wider variance among teachers. One paper considered too poor for a passing grade by some might be rated excellent by others. This type of experiment has been repeated many times, and always with similar results: Teachers' marks are a very unreliable means of measurement.

Most U.S. education professors deride standardized testing. But much of their research is fraudulent—incorporating selective references, fudged definitions and calculations, and other misrepresentations.

An absence of standardized testing typically fosters social promotion, a practice that results in courses being taught at grade level for the self-motivated, advanced kids. Conversely, any kids who are struggling get thumb-twiddling study halls that teach nothing.

An absence of standardized testing increases

schools' reliance on teacher grading, which is more idiosyncratic. Independent teachers narrow the curriculum to what they personally prefer and teach to it. Students learn a teacher's preferences and how to manipulate the teacher's perceptions. Many teachers grade students on class participation, perceived effort, comportment; they might also compensate for socioeconomic background. Actual subject-matter mastery is just one among many factors considered.

Critics allege that standardized tests encourage cheating. Eliminating these tests will not eliminate the problem. Absent external monitoring, school administrators enjoy more latitude both to cheat and to hide the cheating with any type of test. An independent agency, such as a state auditor, should administer educational tests.

Without standardized tests it becomes problematic for anyone outside the classroom to gauge student progress or curriculum effectiveness. Interested parties would depend totally on what education insiders chose to tell them.

Besides, testing promotes learning. Tests motivate, and results are used to monitor, diagnose and remediate. And, psychologists have found that actively generated information, as recalled during a test, is more durably retained than that passively reviewed by ordinary study.

from an expert in the field



Karen Zittleman is a teacher and educational author focusing on teacher effectiveness and educational equity. She most recently co-authored *Teachers, Schools, and Society* (McGraw-Hill, 2013; not available at Costco).

TESTS THEMSELVES are not bad. A test can tell us not only how well students are learning, but, just as important, what students have not learned. But not all

tests deserve cheers. When tests diminish learning to a single score, it is called high-stakes testing and can seriously hamper education. In recent years, the United States has built a damaging high-stakes testing culture, using standardized tests.

Standardized tests in math and reading have been mandated by the federal government and implemented in different ways in different states. They are used to determine which students get promoted, graduate or are destined to drop out; which teachers keep their jobs or get raises or are fired; which schools stay open and which are closed.

As testing pressure builds, schools, teachers and students devote one-third or more of the school year to test preparation. Classes in history, science, language, arts and other subjects not tested are de-emphasized or ignored. This narrowing of the curriculum to fit the test creates scripted lessons, scripted teachers and scripted students. If test scores increase in a school, Alfie Kohn—a leading figure in progressive education—advises parents to ask, "What did you have to sacrifice

about my child's education to raise those scores?"

Tests often measure wealth. Students in under-resourced schools start behind, struggle on tests and suffer the financial and academic consequences. Schools in wealthy neighborhoods do well on tests, and are often given more state money as a reward. Less well known are the financial winners in today's testing culture: the companies who sell and grade standardized tests. This is now a multibillion-dollar industry. The result is not better education, but resources going from public schools to the private sector.

What's the answer? Perhaps Finland can offer some ideas. Finland trusts well-trained teachers to create a curriculum as well as tests that recognize the uniqueness of each student. Students take only one standardized test when they complete high school so that Finnish schools can be compared internationally. Without a culture of standardized testing, Finland's students achieve at or near the top of all nations, a powerful lesson for us.

We need to challenge today's clamor for increased testing. Raising standardized test scores is completely different from helping students to learn. Every hour spent on such test preparation is an hour not spent helping students to think critically and creatively, to tackle controversial issues and to love learning.

JULY

DEBATE RESULTS:

Should offshore bank accounts be taxable?

51% YES
49% NO

Percentage reflects votes received by July 16, 2013.

JUNE DEBATE RESULTS:

Are U.S. manufacturing jobs still important to the economy?

YES: 97% NO: 3%

Percentage reflects votes received by June 30, 2013.



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