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Standardized Testing: The Act Leaving Children Behind

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STANDARDIZED TESTING: THE ACT LEAVING CHILDREN BEHIND

SADIE DOSS ----7 DECEMBER 2020

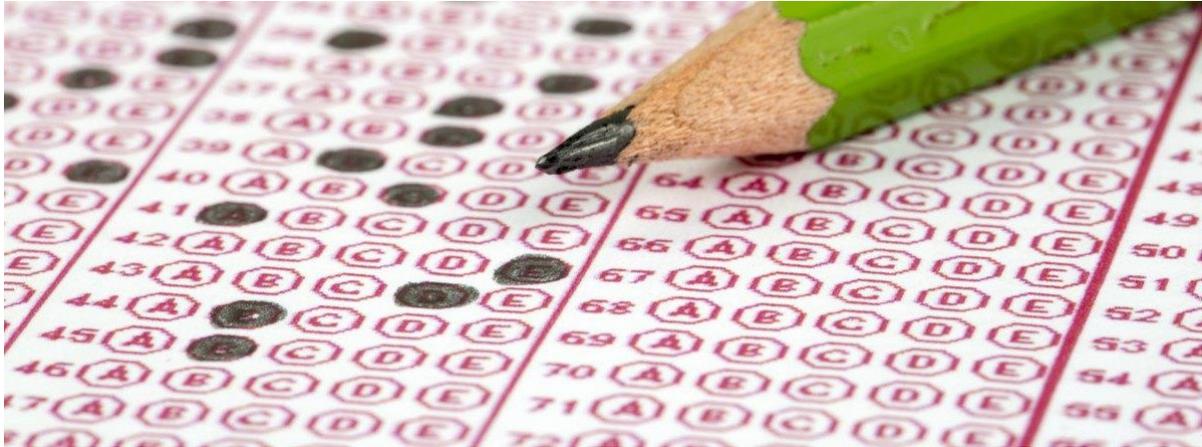


IMAGE BY PROCON.ORG

The room you are sitting in is cold and quiet. You can only hear the ticking of the clock at the front of the room. Your hand is in pain from gripping onto your pencil a little too tight for the past hour and a half. The pounding in your head intensifies. You know that time is running out, but there are still so many more questions to answer. You write until you feel as if you cannot write anymore. You write until the time runs out. At that point, you sigh in relief. The darkness that once surrounded you turns to light as you remember there are others in the room experiencing the same stress of taking a standardized testing. You feel much better now that the test is over, but dread knowing you will have to wait weeks for your results.

We all know the struggle of taking a standardized test. We know the stress of looking at the clock seemingly every 10 seconds, and dreading looking back down at the monstrosity of a test left to complete. We all know the feeling of putting the pencil down and feeling as if we have done everything that we could, and now, all we can do is wait and hope that we get a good score. For some, this score can be the deciding factor on being able to get into certain courses, or even getting into college. A lot rides on the performance of these standardized tests.

Standardized Testing has taken the modern educational system by storm. A few years ago, students might have taken a one or two standardized tests throughout their educational

career. In 2016's, "[How Much Testing is Too Much?](#)" Erik Robelen, writer for the *Atlantic*, asserts that students now spend "20 to 25 hours each year taking mandatory standardized tests". The figure below describes how 40-45% of teachers believe that their students spend at least one week taking mandated tests. This is a significant amount of time taking mandated tests that could have been spent learning.

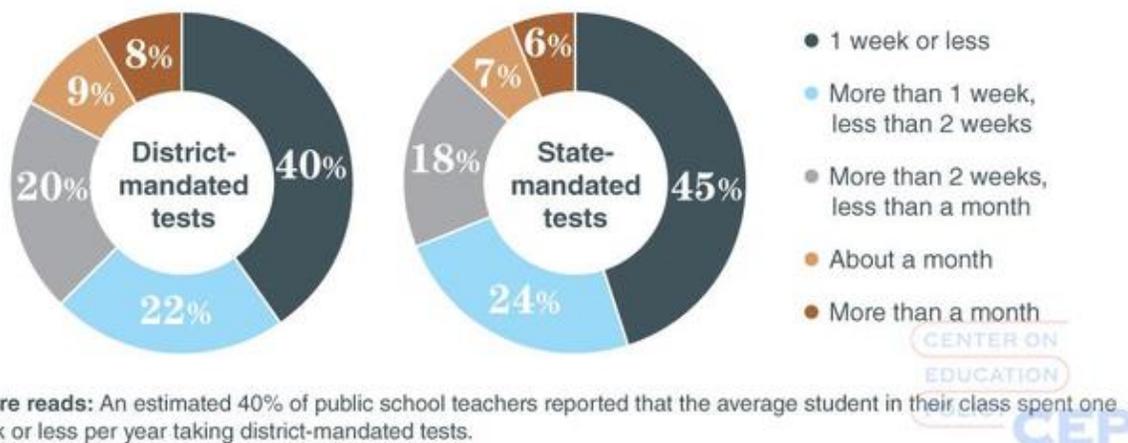


IMAGE BY: [THE ATLANTIC](#), 2016

Although testing isn't inherently bad, it is difficult to determine someone's academic progress based on a test. These tests can merely measure materials learned. Every student must perform well on a single test, regardless of race, socioeconomic status, location, ability or intelligence level. These factors are the ones that refrain these students from achieving the testing goals. We live in a society that emphasizes on being unique and different, yet all students are expected to perform well on the same test. Every student has a unique background. Every student has unique needs. Spending this much time not only taking standardized tests, but also the time needed to prepare for these tests, take away opportunities for these students to grow academically and emotionally. This time could be spent providing a personalized education for these students that allow them to grow in ways that work best for them so that they can reach their full potential. Instead, these students must put multiple weeks of preparation for a test that only scratches the surface of their true ability. According to the article "[Standardized Tests are Inaccurate](#)", written by Sofia Ershova of St

Petersburg College, these tests discriminate particularly against students with special needs, students with English as their second language, and those who may excel in art or other skills. Regardless of who you are, everyone receives the same exact questions. Ershova concludes by saying, "Every student is an individual, with his or her own talents and skills. For this reason, not all students excel in the same subject. Every student is unique and cannot be treated as a whole. A standardized test made for a standard student cannot accurately determine the intelligence and performance of an individual". It is unreasonable to believe that every student can excel in all areas- so states are left to lower their testing standards so that everyone can seemingly excel in every area.

As a student myself, I understand the stress and pressure of taking these tests. The feeling of failure if I did not perform well in every academic area. I understand the fear of losing opportunities based on my results. For me, certain testing determined what classes I was able to take. I had to test well in order to take a higher-level class. Tested poorly? Too bad, you can't take the class you want. But now, through my research of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, I also understand that these tests affect more than just what classes I can take. It has resulted in unequal funding and access to resources, which in turn affect healthy human development and even college access.

Standardized Testing has long been a staple in the United States, but the No Child Left Behind Act made it even more ubiquitous. According to Helen Ladd's article titled "[No Child Left Behind: A Deeply Flawed Federal Policy](#)", the No Child Left Behind Act signed in 2001 by President Bush, had the goal of increasing the quality of education for students in elementary and secondary education. To do this, "students were tested annually in reading, writing, and math with a goal to reach a 100% proficiency rate. Schools that successfully did this received funding, and those that did not had to follow a yearly plan until they could reach the goal". Although the idea on paper seemed admirable, this act ultimately failed already struggling school districts. The negative effects of this act are still prevalent throughout our educational system today.

Immediate action is necessary in order to create a brighter society for the students of this country. It's our duty to protect these children and have their best interests at heart. These students are our future, and we will be jeopardizing all of our futures if we do not fight for change.

Increasing the Funding Gap

Thinking back to my own high school experiences, I could walk down the hall and hear my classmates tuning their instruments. I could hear our choir harmonizing with one another. I could see murals being painted for the fall play and see the young actors practicing their lines. I had the pleasure of having a prominent music and art program in my school. Others cannot say the same. In terms of funding, music and art programs are usually the first to go when there is not enough funding within the school.

Photo By: [Home Away from Home Academy](#)

Granted, losing music programs may not seem to be a major issue to some, but the No Child Left Behind Act has taken more than just instruments away from these kids. Music and art programs have been proven to “relieve stress, boost creativity and improve test scores” according to Lauren Martin’s “[10](#)



[Benefits of Music Education for Students](#)”. Through the incentivization of standardized testing, these programs have been stolen from these students. Music and art programs are the very programs that not only benefit the wellbeing of students, but these programs can increase test performance on standardized tests, which also benefits the school. This allows these schools to reach their adequate yearly progress. Through the No Child Left Behind Act, schools that could not perform to the expected rate would lose funding and would have to try and provide the same level of education with less money. As a result, these music programs were some of the first to go. This act did the very opposite of what they intended to do. Bush wanted to create a

better educational environment by creating competition through test scores, but his act cut the very programs that allowed these students to succeed.

In addition to cutting programs, this act has also stolen some very foundational factors that contribute to vital healthy human development. As shown in a video titled, "[Life Inside Detroit Public Schools](#)" directed by the American Federation of Teachers, Spain Elementary-Middle School in Detroit had inhumane conditions that damaged the quality of life and education to these young students. Their gym had mold and dangerous floor conditions. Their playground had steam coming from a pipe that reached temperatures up to 114°. The children at this school had no music teacher, no playground to play in and no gymnasium. So, these children walked the halls to get rid of their energy. Teachers were given little prep-time for the week and students did not receive books, rather just sheets of paper. Kids risk being burned on their playground, inhaling mold throughout their school, and they risk increased violence by not being able to get rid of their pent-up energy/emotion during recess. As adults, it is hard enough to remain focused on work all day without some sort of break. Imagine these kids being forced to sit in their desks, stare at incandescent lights all day and be bored out of their minds. They need a break just as much as we do.

This environment, as exemplified by Spain Elementary Middle School in Detroit, as well as all of the other schools suffering from similar experiences, is no environment to learn in. These students do not even have access to paperback books; how can we expect them to test equally as well to students who have all the resources needed in order to succeed? Instead of the government stepping up and helping improve conditions, the No Child Left Behind Act would punish these very schools because they could not reach their adequate yearly progress. These schools who were already struggling would have to suffer the consequences of not being able to perform equally as well as schools with an influx in funding. That is one of the many flaws of the No Child Left Behind Act: the ignorance to the many factors that contribute to academic performance. This act did not take location, race, socioeconomic status or ability into consideration when deciding to incentivize standardized testing. As a result, these districts who were destined to fail then had funding ripped away from them.

These schools who are living in poor conditions are the ones who need money, time, and resources the most. They are barely holding themselves above water and they are being punished for the conditions that they have little control over. These schools are struggling to maintain the basic needs for these students. They have little expendable money to invest in their students and yet are held to the same standard as everyone else. Relying on test scores alone does not acknowledge the outside conditions that students endure. At the end of the day, every student, regardless of where they live, how much money their parents have, or what their skin color is, deserves a quality education that prepares them for life after school. It is our job as citizens of this country to protect these children and give them a more equal shot.

Many factors contribute to the success of school districts. Some of these factors include funding, supplies, space, and an adequate student to teacher ratio. Although I find it commendable that schools are being rewarded for positive results on tests, it is equally as important, if not, more important to spend extra time and resources to school districts that need the help in order to rebuild these schools into healthy learning environments. Taking funding away from these schools is similar to a doctor rewarding a healthy patient, while refusing to serve a patient in need. It is the job of the federal government to do what they can to ensure everyone can succeed. By ignoring these schools who need help, they are letting thousands of families down.

The Children that are Being Left Behind

It is also important to mention the individual worth of students. Incentivizing test scores results in schools mistreating their students. According to Janille Cunningham in her article, [“Missing the Mark: Standardized Testing as Epistemological Erasure in U.S. Schooling”](#) she describes how the, “No Child Left Behind act diminished instructional quality by narrowing the curriculum to content covered on tests and encouraged exclusionary tactics to keep low-performing students out of school in order to boost schoolwide test scores”. This demonstrates how schools treated students as pawns, rather than competent individuals who are worthy of a quality education. Sam Dillon, writer for the New York Times, exemplifies the effects of this act in his article [“Federal Researches Find Lower Standards in Schools”](#). He describes how the

incentivization of standardized tests, schools resulted in lowering the standard of education in order to boost test scores and receive funding. The No Child Left Behind Act allowed states to determine the standard for testing requirements. So, states could require less from students in order to show a higher proficiency rate to not be sanctioned. This means educators would ask less of their students, which means plenty of students were not given opportunities to reach their full potential.

Students are more than just a test score. They have so much more to offer. Yet- in this instance- schools would rely solely on their performance to receive federal grants. This makes the actions done by administration in schools to seem ingenuine. Are these academic leaders doing what they can to ensure every student succeeds? Or are they doing what they can to receive funding? There are many factors that already negatively impact these students. The quality of education is diminished, the treatment of these students is ethically wrong, and the lack of understanding for these students are all ways that the No Child Left Behind Act has hurt these kids. We need to do what we can to help, and by ensuring more funding and opportunities for those in need is the least that we can do.

Incentivizing standardized tests also questions the competence of teachers. We need to trust that our teachers can individually test the growth of these students. They know these students at a deeper level, unlike tests that only scratch the surface of their ability. These teachers can focus on the personal needs of these students. We need to give freedom to teachers and let them decide what is necessary for their students to grow both personally and academically. We need to treat both students and teachers as competent individuals worthy of making decisions based on their own needs, instead of the government making important decisions on individuals that they know nothing about.

Moving Forward

So many factors affect a test score. Did the student eat breakfast? Get enough sleep? Able to attend class regularly? Are they a good test taker? It is unfair that a child's worth is based on their performance of a test. The No Child Left Behind Act let down millions of people

involved throughout the educational system. It took opportunities away from deserving kids based on conditions that they could not control. The government treated kids as pawns and teachers as incompetent in doing their job. As citizens, it is our duty to ensure every student is receiving quality education in a healthy environment. It is our duty to make sure every person is treated with dignity and respect.

The integrity of our educational system is at risk. Because of this act, we know the government is willing to ignore the cries for help from schools in need and that schools are willing to jeopardize the wellbeing of students in order to make a profit. We, as voters, are the ones that can hold those who can make a change responsible. We can prevent this from happening again. We all know the stress of taking a test. We know the fear of knowing the results. We now can think back and recall the ways that we were either privileged or not in the classroom. The federal government has the power to ensure all students are protected in the classroom. We need to vote for those who not only vow to create a healthier environment for these kids, but we need to vote for those who can create actions behind their words.

Increasing the quality of education, as well as providing the necessary resources for students to succeed also benefits our taxpayers. Bill Friday, former president of the University of North Carolina, [discusses](#) how helping these children will also benefit our pockets. He describes, "These (students) are the workforce that the country is going to have to have by the end of this century. We are going to have to create a half a million jobs in North Carolina in the next 10 years...70% of these jobs will require at least 14 years of academic preparation. Now that means they must stay in school and excel in school." When students drop out, they are more likely to rely on federal programs to provide their basic needs, like food, shelter, and money. When we can create a more sustainable environment for these students, we allow more people to join the workforce. These people now have more opportunities to reach their full potential, rather than being subjected to a path that makes them reliant on others.

It is vital to stay educated about this system. We need to hold these officials to higher standards in order to create a brighter society for these students. A society where everyone can succeed in ways that are more than just a test score. Because at the end of the day, everyone is

unique. Everyone has their own abilities that make them perfectly who they are. We need to provide a system that reaches everyone's potential. This 'one size fits all' format has been proven to fail, and now we can develop ways in which no student has to suffer again based on the incentivization of their test scores.