

High Stakes Testing

Since the enactment of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB), some parents, teachers, and administrators have taken their own stand against something that they believe is harmful for public education and American children: high stakes testing. Under NCLB, every child in the U.S. must achieve proficiency in reading and math. While each state can determine its own level of proficiency, a child's ability to advance to the next grade level, and even graduate from high school, hinges on passing a standardized test. Across the U.S., children in minority communities have been more likely not to receive a diploma due to low-test scores on mandated exams.

Assessment has many benefits. Advocates of large-scale assessments claim that it is an objective and fair measure of student achievement. Results show how students, or groups of students, measure up against one another and broader standards. Ideally, all children throughout the country will receive an equal education, and testing can help educators target where instructional improvements are necessary. Sonja Brookins Santelises, Vice President of K-12 Policy and Practice for the Education Trust, acknowledges that there is too much rote test preparation, but argues that we must work together to reduce the achievement gap among student populations. The founder of nonprofit organization StudentsFirst and former Chancellor of D.C. Public Schools, Michelle Rhee, also sees standardized testing as a means to reduce this gap. She states, "It's not inconceivable for a student to be receiving all A's and B's on her report card but still be stuck far behind her peers in other districts and states across the country. And without standardized testing, that child's parents, teachers and principal would have no idea."

Opponents, however, firmly believe that high stakes testing is problematic and even ruinous to our educational system. There is no research to corroborate that standardized testing, a multi-billion dollar industry controlled by three large U.S. corporations, is effective. Teachers complain that they are forced to "teach to the test," leaving little or no time for subjects that are not tested, such as art, social studies, and science. Parent and former teacher Edy Chamness founded a Facebook group in 2011 to rally parents in her community to protest against school accountability and standardized testing requirements. She also kept her son out of school on testing days. Other parents, including Maeve Siano of Celina, Texas, similarly felt that the preparation and stress associated with testing were more likely to damage her son than help him. Celina Superintendent Donny O'Dell stated, "Our country was basically founded on rebellion, so to speak. So I don't hold that against any of these parents, but we as educators have to do what we have to do...and we need some form of accountability."



Discussion Questions:

1. What is your view on the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001? What is your view on standardized testing in particular?
2. If you were a teacher or administrator who disagreed with standardized testing, but would be at risk of losing your job if you acted on your beliefs, what would you do?
3. Many detractors of standardized testing argue that it is ruining education and is a detriment to our children. Did Edy Chamness demonstrate moral action by opting her child out of testing? How so or how not?
4. Many supporters of standardized testing argue that education needs some form of accountability, without which we would be failing our children. Do you think districts that enforce standardized testing are demonstrating moral action? Why or why not?
5. Whose responsibility is it to determine what students should learn and how they should be assessed? Defend your position.

Resources:

Testing, Assessment, and Excellence

<http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/schools/testing/merrow.html>

Is the Use of Standardized Tests Improving Education in America?

<http://standardizedtests.procon.org/>

High Stakes Testing

<http://www.education.com/reference/article/high-stakes-testing1/>

Crash Test

<http://www.texasmonthly.com/story/crash-test/>

Standardized test backlash: More parents pull kids from exams as protest

<http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Education/2015/0430/Standardized-test-backlash-More-parents-pull-kids-from-exams-as-protest>

Testing the Limits: A Texas Mother's Radical Revolt Against Standardized Tests

<http://www.texasobserver.org/mother-against-standardized-testing/>

Michelle Rhee: Opting out of standardized tests? Wrong answer.

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/michelle-rhee-opting-out-of-standardized-tests-wrong-answer/2014/04/04/37a6e6a8-b8f9-11e3-96ae-f2c36d2b1245_story.html

Author:

Christina Bain, Ph.D.

Department of Art and Art History

College of Fine Arts

The University of Texas at Austin