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STANDARDIZING AMERICA: WHY IT SHOULD BE A METHOD OF THE PAST

By Samantha N. Jackson

I. INTRODUCTION

Standardized testing has taken the headline of the American educational ‘newspaper’ in recent years. Standardized testing takes different forms in different states, but it simply consists of all students answering the same questions and all results being scored in the same way so that performance can be compared relatively by school district, region, or state. The issue with these tests comes into play when questioning how effective and necessary these tests actually are. While they do in fact ensure that every student is having the same experience, with the same questions, time allotment, and so on, it could also hinder the learning experience. Teachers that are trying to cram in lesson plans to meet the objectives of the standardized testing might not be teaching in an exciting, interactive manner as they may were not trying to meet a deadline. There can be many adverse effects of this high-stakes system on the students, teachers, and administration. Along with this, it is possible that standardized testing only increases the disadvantages that students with specific needs have. With so many different cultures, personalities, learning styles, and individual qualities of students in American classrooms, standardized testing seems rather counterproductive and ineffective in providing a classroom that promotes success outside of testing. This research essay will seek to bring attention to the negative implications of standardized testing on students and teachers, how standardized testing negatively affects minority students, bilingual students, and special needs students, as well as

bring attention to the inefficiencies of standardized testing and provide alternative methods through analysis of existing research and personal accounts.

II. PURPOSE

The purpose of this research paper is to evaluate and investigate the negative characteristics of standardized testing in America and aim to argue why the use of standardized testing no longer serves valuable purpose in the American education system. Central questions that will be examined in this research include: What is the history of standardized testing in America and what does standardized testing look like in America? How does standardized testing affect teachers and students? Can standardized testing accurately measure progress across a diverse group of students? Are standardized tests effective in measuring student performance? And, finally, what are alternatives to standardized testing? Through answering these questions, the true benefits of eliminating standardized testing will be exposed and developed on to provide alternative methods of examining student performance and progress.

III. SIGNIFICANCE OF RESEARCH

The topic of this research is the evaluation of standardized testing in the American education system. This is a very pertinent issue in regards to how and if the system should be revamped. Students, teachers and parents all deal with standardized testing on a yearly basis across the country, so it relates to a large portion of the American population and plays a huge role in the education system. There are many public opinions on whether or not standardized testing is ultimately beneficial or detrimental to a student's performance in the classroom. Clarifying the details of the standardized system can aid in understanding if a shift to other methods of student evaluation needs to be made.

IV. METHODOLOGY

This research intends to include many approaches arguing against the use of standardized testing in the American education system. Historical research will be conducted to identify the original need for standardized testing and when it started making its way into the American school system. Research will also be undertaken to determine and suggest if other methods of evaluating student performance would be more conducive in present day. Evaluation research will be used to learn more about the contents and systems of standardized testing, and what the most common forms are. A personal interview will be conducted with a teacher who has experience with administering standardized tests to gain a firsthand account of how teachers believe standardized testing affects them and their classroom environment. Data regarding the most efficient methods of evaluating standardized testing will be used to determine whether or not standardized testing is a proper method for current day and is actually efficient in capturing a student's capabilities at the end of a school year. Finally, research will be conducted to determine alternatives to standardized testing, if there are any, that would better suit the classroom environment.

V. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Standardized testing and its pros and cons have been subject to lots of research over time. The research used in this paper will be an aid in investigating why standardized testing is not an efficient means of evaluating student performance and often causes more harm than good. The review of the literature being used in this paper will focus on specific areas including: effects on students, effects on teachers, standardized testing and diversity, why standardized testing is

inefficient, and alternatives to standardized testing. The searches conducted for this literature review were completed with Google Scholar, Sage Journals, and JSTOR. Searches that were conducted focused on the impacts of standardized testing within the context of the American education system. It is important for this paper to identify these areas to create a better understanding of what role standardized testing plays in the American education system.

The reviewed research suggests that standardized testing has a negative effect on students and their learning environments. Research from the University of Virginia found that students show mental and physical implications of standardized testing including headaches, anxiety, and trouble sleeping (Moon et al.). The case was further made that standardized testing creates a system not focused on putting student's needs first and more focused on unnecessary aspects that will prepare students for state assessments (Lazarín). The pressure that students face from standardized testing only takes away from their actual learning and comprehension of the material. In contrast to this, however, Suggate and Reese suggest that this pressure is actually motivation for students to work hard continuously throughout the school year thus improving student's work ethic (265).

While students face pressure from parents, teachers, and peers, teachers actually face a lot of pressure from the administration and school districts. Research has shown that some teachers even experience negative physical effects during standardized testing periods and the months before the tests are administered (Moon et al.). Teachers who teach in poorly-performing districts are under greater pressure to improve their scores in fear of being fired (Herman et al. 481). This is because individual teachers and schools are blamed for low test scores (Volante). This can lead to an unfortunate and unwelcoming environment for everyone in the school.

Standardized testing takes is least effective in accommodating the diverse population of the United States. Research by Kohn in 2002 suggests that standardized testing can be biased

against minority and low-income students noting that they are less likely to have access outside resources. Children who speak English as their second language are also at a disadvantage and consistently perform poorly compared to monolingual children (Saenz and Huer 184). Students with mental and physical disabilities are also often left behind due to the fast-paced nature of teaching test-specific material (McDermott and McDermott 505). The disadvantages that these students face are only exacerbated by the nature of standardized testing.

Critics of standardized testing focus on the fact that these assessments do not accurately measure a student's comprehension. Sacks suggests that standardized testing only shows how well a student can take a test and does not measure how knowledgeable the student is (25). Langer and Pradl suggest that both teachers and principals find that teacher observation and student classwork provide better examples of student achievements than standardized tests (765). It is because of these inefficiencies that standardized testing should be used either in conjunction with other methods of student achievement testing or gotten rid of altogether.

The research that is presented in this paper will aid in providing context and information regarding the negative effects of standardized testing. The different angles that are provided in the research will help to explain why standardized testing is harmful to the school system as a whole and the impact it has on students and teachers.

VI. THE HISTORY OF STANDARDIZED TESTING IN AMERICA

Although standardized testing is thought to be a current and important topic in today's age, the origins of it are deeply rooted in American society. Horace Mann can be accredited with the start of the development of what standardized tests have become. In 1845, he suggested that children should have to display their knowledge on written examinations compared to oral ones. His hope

was that this would provide equal opportunities to every student, where bias would be limited (Gershon). As early as before the Civil War, teachers were giving students externally sourced assessments to demonstrate the progress they made throughout the school year. Army tests that were used to measure soldier's performance and mental capabilities slowly replicated into the public-school system (Alcocer). A huge step in the development included the passing of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) by President Lyndon B. Johnson in 1965. The goal of this act was to guarantee that all children receiving education through public schools "are given the same opportunity to achieve to high standards and are held to the same high expectations as all other students in each State" ("Standards, Assessment, and Accountability"). However, standardized testing did not take its modern-day form until 1994 with the Clinton administration enforcement that stated any state that received funding for impoverished schools must begin testing their students in math and reading to ensure quality and efficiency of education. This was reinforced with the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act from President George W. Bush, which set standards that science testing must be given once a year from grades three to eight and in high school. While intentions may have been good, No Child Left Behind was more than controversial. It made it more difficult for schools with low performance on standardized test scores to receive large amounts of federal funding.

President Obama was one of the first politicians to address the potential issues with standardized testing. Obama's reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act in 2015 was called the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) and aimed at revamping the inefficiencies of No Child Left Behind by making sure increasing achievement was coming from low-performing schools. The implementation of ESSA "invited up to seven states, or groups of states, to participate in an 'innovative assessment' pilot aimed at using performance tasks and other

types of student work instead of states' previous tests” as well as allowing “individual districts to drop their state's high school exam and use a ‘nationally recognized’ high school test such as the SAT or ACT instead” (Gewertz). It was thought and hoped that the flexibility brought by this new act would encourage states to reevaluate their standardized testing programs and try alternative measures. States, however, were less than willing to adapt these ideas, simply because they were unsure if it would make any difference in the grand scheme of their assessments. Path dependency is presumably an appropriate answer for why all but a handful of states were not willing to reform. The risk of a failing new educational system may be more detrimental in the state’s view than existing problems with standardized testing.

It is the state’s right to develop and create their own version of the test, when it will be given, and the questions that appear on the test (Kumeh). In Virginia, for example, standardized tests are called Standards of Learning—commonly known by students, teachers, and parents alike as SOL’s. The standards and details of these SOL’s are specific to Virginia and are different than California’s Standardized Testing and Reporting, commonly known as the STAR tests, which are different from Kentucky’s Core Content Tests (KCCT). While this does give the states some leeway regarding the means of testing, states are still put in a position where they cannot simply avoid standardized testing.

VII. NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF STANDARDIZED TESTING

A. Effects on Teachers

Similar to the pressure that students face from teachers and parents, teachers are pressured by their administration. Teachers feel that their administration is treating them unfairly and even placing their jobs in jeopardy if they have consistently low-performance from their students. Statewide

scores are often released and compared across school districts, making it obvious which districts performed better than others. It is easy for low-performance to be directly linked to specific teachers, and although this may not be true, it acts as a representation of their quality of teaching. This figuratively backs teachers into a corner. Do they risk presenting content to students that will not help them succeed in the standardized tests? Why would they, if it is going to be perceived as a direct representation of them as a quality instructor. It forces teachers to take time away from their passion of creating fun, intriguing content and only encourages them to stick to the curriculum and become “more driven to focus on test content and to emphasize test preparation in their instructional programs” (Herman et al. 481). Eventually, this could lead to a decline of interest into the profession of teaching.

The profession of teaching is changing with the increasing emphasis on test scores. The amount of pressure feeds into the idea that, “getting high scores instead of learning has become the goal of education” (Moon et al.). Teachers are even experiencing changes in the dynamic of the school when standardized testing periods are approaching. Activities such as, “pep rallies, field trips, and breaks outside, as well as dress- up days during ‘Spirit Week,’” are being pushed back to times when standardized tests are over out of fear that they, “distract students during testing” (Winkler 220). It seems that the culture of education and the excitement of being a teacher is shifting because of the presence of standardized testing and what it means for the state.

A personal interview conducted with Michelle Jackson, a 7th grade science teacher at Great Neck Middle School in Virginia Beach, Virginia shows the physical stress that teachers face. Mrs. Jackson explains that there is an “incredibly tense feel in the air” during the standardized testing season and that the “anxiety among the students and staff are very visible” (Michelle Jackson, personal communication, November 2, 2019). She also explains that the students can feel the stress

of the teachers and the classroom environment changes, where students become less engaged and willing to express their interests. Fun activities that she has in her lesson plans are often the first to be cut during the time of standardized test review because she is most focused on making sure that students grasp the material she knows they will be tested on. Mrs. Jackson says, “It should not be like this. School is supposed to be fun, engaging, and interesting for everyone. Standardized testing creates such a harsh environment and it is unfortunate for everyone involved” (Michelle Jackson, personal communication, November 2, 2019). It is clear that teachers are under a huge amount of pressure during the months leading up to standardized testing.

B. Effects on Students

As students in the American school system are the ones taking the standardized exams, it is clear that there are many pressures placed on them to perform well. The research describes that students have a serious apathy to standardized testing related to the sheer fear of testing and pressure from teachers, parents, and administrators. Students are even showing physical signs of this stress, including “headaches, crying, and problems with self-esteem” (Moon et al.). Test anxiety is a very common occurrence that students of all ages experience. The anxiety in the days, weeks, and months leading up to the standardized test can cause sleepless nights and lowered attention in class. All of the stress that students face can cause low performance on the standardized tests, leading to feelings of failure and disappointment about themselves. These feelings of disappointment can also come from teachers and parents. This can lead to extreme issues with self-image and create a vicious cycle of low-performance.

Along with the stress that comes with preparations for standardized tests, students are missing out on creative opportunities in the classroom. Standardized testing often comes with “significant amounts of test preparation, such as taking practice tests” (Lazarín). Students are being

taught information that is based on the curriculum that is covered on tests, and while other information may be important, encourage creativity, and give students the opportunity to be interactive, there simply is not enough time for it.

VIII. STANDARDIZED TESTING FOR DISADVANTAGED STUDENTS

While standardized testing takes enough of a toll on the average student, disadvantaged students have an even more difficult time adapting to this method of testing. There are many types of people within the United States, and our diversity is what makes us one of the best countries in the world. However, this increases the difficulty of accommodating everyone on a statewide assessment. These tests give an otherwise unearned advantage to native English speakers, students of higher socio-economic classes, and students without disabilities. Obviously, however, there are many students in the school system that do not fit into these molds.

A. Effects on Minority and Low-Income Students

Minority and low-income students in the school system often face adversity in many ways. Schools themselves are in bad condition, the teachers are not as qualified, and there is little funding to create a better learning environment. Standardized testing proves no different. Standardized tests can be biased towards privileged children because the content “require[s] a set of knowledge and skills more likely to be possessed by children from a privileged background” (Kohn). It is thought that some requirements and information in the tests are more likely to appear in children with a privileged home life. With that, people from a higher socio-economic status have the means of ensuring that their child can seek extra help from outside sources. When they need it, “affluent families, schools, and districts are better able to afford such products, and the most effective versions of such products, thereby exacerbating the inequity of such testing” (Kohn). In fact, Kohn

also presents that tests are more about the skill of test-taking rather than actual understanding of the material, and this is more commonly used in schools with higher rates of minority students. In an effort to raise test scores, the teaching focuses on constantly filling out worksheets and is more about memorization. Children in privileged situations can avoid this with outside resources providing them a hands-on learning experience and real-life implications of the content they are learning. Further, teachers who teach in low-performance districts have a lot to lose when it comes to the scores of the children on the statewide assessments. This puts extra pressure on minority and low-income students by the teachers. Minority and low-income students are more likely to be denied a degree because of failing a standardized test and are more likely to drop out of school as a whole (Kohn). The high-stakes atmosphere is a huge disadvantage for minority and students of low socioeconomic status.

B. Effects on Bilingual Students

Bilingual is defined as “using or able to use two languages especially with equal fluency” (“Bilingual”). In the context of this discussion, it refers to people who speak English and another language. These children speak a different language at home and are learning English while in school. It is quite clear that students who are not proficient in English should not be taking standardized tests in English; however, it does happen. The English language is an incredibly hard language to learn, and it often takes many years of practice to master, and “the consensus is that the administration of language tests in English using current norms is inappropriate for students whose dominant language is not English” (Saenz and Huer 184). Comprehension of English is much more difficult than speaking the language as well. In order to provide a quality of education that gives the students the best resources that they need, it is important to recognize those who are not proficient in English and not expect them to test at the same level as those who speak English

as their only language. Even though these students “are fluent in conversational contexts” (Saenz and Huer 184), their performance on standardized testing shows the struggles with comprehension that present themselves. Not only are they being tested in a language that they are not proficient in, but they are also expected to, “perform on grade level” for which they are clearly not prepared, as they are unable to “learn all the nuances of the subject matter material” due to the time spent learning the English language (Moon et al).

While English tests may prove no disadvantage among most minorities, students of Asian and Latino descent are the most affected by this. This reinforces the fact that low-income children are continuously below the mark of passing standardized testing than children of higher socioeconomic classes. Latino families are more likely to be a part of this low-income group and face adversity because of such as well (Kohn). Students in areas with ample funding may have access to ESL (English as Second Language) classrooms and specially trained educators that can provide them a more individualized approach to learning while taking into consideration their lack of proficiency in English. Unfortunately, a lot of low-income school districts do not receive the funding they need to be able to provide these services to their students.

C. Effects on Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities, whether it be physical or mental capabilities, are also at a disadvantage when it comes to standardized testing. In most cases, students with disabilities require special attention and individualized instruction to ensure they are up to speed with material, especially when required to meet the same expectations as students who are not disabled. Unfortunately, similarly to the cases of bilingual students, a lot of school districts do not have the means to fund such intensive and specific programs, and “legislators [are] in no way hastening to make such individualized tutoring available to the general population of students with disabilities”

(McDermott and McDermott 505). Parents and teachers are pushing for the equality of education when it comes to these students.

In Alaska, for example, parents and educators worked with the Department of Education and Early Development and fought for accommodations to be made for students with disabilities; however, “the accommodations were to be available to only 2% of the special education population” (McDermott and McDermott 505). That is an extreme underrepresentation of the special education students in the school system, which means that most children with special needs are not being helped the way they should be. Because these students are not receiving the proper attention that they need, they are performing poorly on these statewide exams compared to the general school population:

The group with primarily physical exceptionalities passed the reading section of the HSGQE at a 52% rate, writing at 25%, and mathematics at 9%. The group with either cognitive-processing or emotional exceptionalities passed the same test sections with the following rates: reading, 39%; writing, 6%; and mathematics, 5%. Compare these passing rates with the passing rates of all students across the state of Alaska: reading, 75%; writing, 48%; mathematics, 33%. Within the Anchor- age School District, the pass rates were as follows: reading, 78%; writing, 51%; and mathematics, 36%. (McDermott and McDermott 505)

As we have seen with other demographics of students with constant low performance, such as those of minority and low-income, this increases the risk of these students dropping out of school and missing opportunities because they see no point in continuing their education. A lot of students see their high-school diploma as the validation of all of the hard work they put into school, however making it harder, almost impossible, for them to obtain it gives them little motivation to put effort

into their education. It is a sad, yet very real reality for many who are not performing where they want to be.

To close the gap between general school populations and special education populations, teachers of lower-aged students are required to perform “benchmark examinations” to more frequently measure student successes (McDermott and McDermott 544). The issue with this arises with the repeated problem of teachers trying to teach for the test and cramming in information already. Although it sounds harsh, there are concerns that taking extra time to prepare and administer the benchmark examinations to better-prepare students of special needs will put everyone in the classroom behind. Some teachers feel that, “they will be impeded by the inclusion of students with special needs who could possibly slow down everybody and thus make everybody, including the teachers, look bad” (McDermott and McDermott 544). With the current education system placing pressure on teachers to bring back high scores, it is no wonder that teachers are hesitant to risk their already limited instruction time. Students with disabilities deserve the accommodations that will help them thrive in their learning environment, and standardized testing is one of the factors failing them.

IX. EFFECTIVENESS OF STANDARDIZED TESTING

Accompanied with all of the research that sheds light on the negative impacts that standardized testing brings to students and educators, there is also speculation on whether standardized testing is even efficient at measuring the academic progress and/or success of the students who take these tests. While standardized testing was created in effort to hold teachers and students accountable for their learning, “influential scholars like Harvard’s Howard Gardner and Yale’s Robert Sternberg have argued forcefully against the narrow views of ability measured by traditional tests”

(Sacks 25). Students who are proficient in other areas of schooling like theatre, music, or writing are not given the opportunity to show their skills and strengths on state assessments. These students, although “very intelligent and good oral communicators...,” may perform poorly on standardized exams and are thus perceived as someone with lower abilities (Moon et al.). While some teachers believe that tests are effective in measuring short-term progress, they “should *not* be the only measurement of learning” (Moon et al.). Additionally, teachers and principals across the nation believe that standardized tests are less useful than teacher-made tests which evaluate what the teacher has been teaching, and that the results of standardized tests are less useful than other data such as student classwork and teacher observation in regards to student achievement (Langer and Pradl 765). It is clear that educators are seeing the discrepancies between test scores and performance in the classroom, and they are ready for a change.

Recent research has shown that student performance is affected by four elements: “(1) the particular topic; (2) the language and structure of the passage, the questions asked relating to the passage, and the indicated mode of response; (3) the expectations, knowledge, and experiences of the individual student; and (4) the environment and general communicative context of the test” (Langer and Pradl 765). Standardized tests do not have the ability to factor in these elements that effect how a student responds to the question. Because of these factors, standardized testing should not be used to evaluate what the capabilities of the student are. Langer also found that students were actually choosing correct answers with incorrect reasoning and incorrect answers with correct reasoning, and “sometimes they never have the opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the passage at all” (765). It is important for students who have strengths outside of the skill of test-taking to have a fair shot at assessment based on their academic knowledge. It is clear that

there is not enough substance to standardized test to accurately provide students with the means of showcasing what they are capable of.

X. ALTERNATIVES TO STANDARDIZED TESTING

Standardized tests were implemented with the goal of making sure that the curriculum was taught by teachers and received by students. It is a method of accountability and provides a means to compare schools, districts and states on a base level. Whether or not this is a correct approach, there needs to be a way of ensuring that students are ready for the next grade level. Standardized testing has alternatives to measure student success without putting every teacher and student through the pressure of standardized testing as it exists in the school system today.

The first method, although not completely avoiding the standardized test, decreases the pressure schoolwide and involves simply sampling a few students to take the test each year. It ensures that teachers are teaching what they need to, however, there is a little more wiggle room and this takes the pressure off of everyone a bit (Kamentz). It could even get more systematic and select students who performed very poorly and very well in previous years and compare this to the tests of the current year. If a student consistently performs poorly across multiple years, then it is likely they have difficulties with test-taking. If a student who typically performs well scores poorly, it may be that the teacher didn't prepare the class well enough. This also eliminates the teacher being held accountable for scores if they are not representative of their teaching. This would be a good option to slowly phase into while transitioning standardized testing out of the education system.

A second method virtually eliminates the need for standardized testing and presents a better overall picture of a student's learning over time. Stealth assessments measure the progress of a

student over the course of the year by recording every answer they give into an online software program (Kamentz). Although this system is still measuring their progress and achievement, it allows students to feel unpressured while evidencing their true capabilities of a topic. It can also show elements beyond the simple statistic of how many right and wrong answers a student has, and the “pattern of answers potentially offers insights into how quickly students learn, how diligent they are and other big-picture factors” (Kamentz). While this would be an excellent alternative to standardized testing, it would be fairly expensive to make sure every school, statewide, has access to the same software. With the inequalities between schools already, it is unlikely that low-income schools—who arguably need it the most—would be at the top of the list to receive such technology.

Finally, the last change that can be made to eliminate the negative impacts of standardized testing involves bringing in other methods of assessments in conjunction with the standard tests. Integrating more group activities, research projects, writing assignments, and portfolio presentations would show other aspects of a student’s performance and when used with standardized testing, can provide insight as to how the student performs in the classroom instead of on tests (Kamentz). This can also allow students with a more creative and artistic spirit an outlet for showcasing their talents and personality while still measuring their progress throughout the school year.

Standardized testing in its current form in the school system is not the only way to measure student progress over the school year. Whether it is completely eliminated, and a more holistic approach is taken, or it is revised and used in conjunction with other methods, it would be a disservice to continue education along the path of relying on standardized testing to measure student capabilities. There is so much more to a student than how well they can answer questions

on a scantron, and these methods are better suited for taking student's personalities and different strengths into account.

XI. COUNTERARGUMENT

Although this research is geared to show the negative impacts of standardized testing, there are still plenty of people who swear by testing in this manner. Granted, it is still being used religiously and very little revisions and reforms have been made. While standardized testing can cause unnecessary pressure on students and teachers, it has benefits that have kept it around for so long.

One major benefit that research promotes is the fact that it allows schools to be compared to one another, and thus closes the achievement gap (“Benefits of Standardized Testing for Students and Teachers”). While this was previously used as a negative in research presented early in this paper, supporters of standardized testing suggest that it brings attention to inconsistencies across schools, districts, and states. If a school or district is continually performing poorly on statewide exams year after year, it can be a clear clue that something has to be changed, whether it is the resources, curriculum, or teaching staff. It also allows schools who consistently perform well to be rewarded for their hard work. While teacher specific assessments may be beneficial to students, “if each school used its own self-written test, there would be no objective way to tell if a student at one school was being better prepared for college and career than one at another school” (“Benefits of Standardized Testing for Students and Teachers”). It also can clarify any discrepancies in the curriculum on a large scale. If there is a certain topic or skill that students statewide are having trouble with, then alterations to the curriculum can be made to better suit the children in the next year. In this case, standardized tests may be a necessary evil to ensure that schools across a state are providing proper resources for each school.

A second strong advantage to statewide testing is that it ensures that appropriate material is being taught at the appropriate age level. It provides guidelines for what a student should be proficient in by the end of each grade level and can provide consistency throughout the state. For example, if a child moves from one district in the state to another, they will be well prepared and learning the same skills they were learning in the previous district (“Benefits of Standardized Testing for Students and Teachers”). The same goes for students who move schools in between grade levels. A student who is going into fourth grade at a new school can be sure they will be learning new material and not repeating information of what they learned in third grade at their previous school.

Finally, standardized testing can serve as great motivation for students and teachers to work hard during the school year. Showing students and preparing them for where they need to be in terms of curriculum can motivate them to develop their skills and achieve a high score. By giving standardized tests and “showing students how they’re doing, testing can level the playing field and create equal opportunity to learn in the classroom” (“Benefits of Standardized Testing for Students and Teachers”). Humans are naturally very competitive and comparing standardized tests with other peers is no different. If a student realizes they perform poorly on a certain subject compared to their peers, they may be more motivated and dedicated to increasing their performance for the next test. It also can be rewarding for students who perform at a high-level to keep up their good work and stay at the top of their class. This works the same for teachers as well. Teachers whose students receive poor standardized tests scores may be more motivated to change up their instruction and be more adaptable to their students, while teachers who receive high scores from their students can feel confident in their abilities and continue the strategy they have in place.

Standardized testing may have its downfalls, but the basis and theory of it serves a beneficial purpose. It keeps students and teachers consistent, on track, and involved in their school, district, and state to provide an equal basis of education throughout. Whereas the intentions of this may have been good, the execution could use some revamp.

XII. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Standardized testing was created in hopes that it would provide insight into the effectiveness of teaching and the resilience of student performance. However, over time it has created an educational environment focused entirely too much on achieving high standardized test scores instead of one that promotes creativity and individuality. The pressures that are put on students and teachers to achieve high test scores makes it hard for students to get the learning experience that they deserve and makes it harder for teachers to implement fun activities when these will not benefit students on the test. Students with special circumstances are even more disadvantaged when it comes to receiving extra attention during standardized tests and a quality education overall. The high-stakes terms of these standardized tests make it hard for students to keep up with material, especially when they have a hard time anyway. It creates a system where schools in areas of wealth are receiving more funding and resources as a reward for high performance, and poor performing schools in areas of poverty are punished with little amounts of funding.

XIII. IMPLICATIONS

The findings in this research and in the scope of the literature surrounding standardized testing should be taken very seriously when considering policy change in regard to the American educational system. The conclusion suggests that there are major flaws in the current system of

standardized testing and should be considered when evaluating other methods for testing that may better serve students, teachers, and education as a whole. This research should motivate educators, students, and parents to voice their opinions about the state of standardized testing to their congressional representatives and policymakers. Whether or not the current system shall stand, it should be reevaluated to show that policymakers are concerned with the educational system and that they are focused on creating the best learning environment for students and the best working environment for teachers.

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