

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

PRO:

Standardized tests are reliable and objective measures of student achievement. Without them, policy makers would have to rely on tests scored by individual schools and teachers who have a vested interest in producing favorable results. Multiple-choice tests, in particular, are graded by machine and therefore are not subject to human subjectivity or bias.

20 school systems that "have achieved significant, sustained, and widespread gains" on national and international assessments used "proficiency targets for each school" and "frequent, standardized testing to monitor system progress," according to a Nov. 2010 report by McKinsey & Company, a global management consulting firm. . . .

"Teaching to the test" can be a good thing because it focuses on essential content and skills, eliminates time-wasting activities that don't produce learning gains, and motivates students to excel. The US Department of Education stated in Nov. 2004 that "if teachers cover subject matter required by the standards and teach it well, then students will master the material on which they will be tested--and probably much more." . . .

Most teachers and administrators approve of standardized tests. Minnesota teachers and administrators interviewed for a study in the Oct. 28, 2005, issue of the peer-reviewed Education Policy Analysis Archives (EPAA) approved of standardized tests "by an overwhelming two-to-one margin," saying they "improved student attitudes, engagement, and effort." An oft-cited Arizona State University study in EPAA's Mar. 28, 2002 edition, concluding that testing has little educational merit, has been discredited by educational researchers for poor methodology, and was criticized for wrongly blaming the tests themselves for stagnant test scores, rather than the shortcomings of teachers and schools.

The multiple-choice format used on standardized tests produces accurate information necessary to assess and improve American schools. According to the Center for Teaching Excellence at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign, multiple-choice questions can provide "highly reliable test scores" and an "objective measurement of student achievement." Today's multiple-choice tests are more sophisticated than their predecessors. The Center for Public Education, a national public school advocacy group, says many "multiple-choice tests now require considerable thought, even notes and calculations, before choosing a bubble."

Stricter standards and increased testing are better preparing school students for college. In Jan. 1998, Public Agenda found that 66% of college professors said "elementary and high schools expect students to learn too little." By Mar. 2002, after a surge in testing and the passing of NCLB, that figure dropped to 47% "in direct support of higher expectations, strengthened standards and better tests." . . .

Cheating by teachers and administrators on standardized tests is rare, and not a reason to stop testing America's children. The Mar. 2011 USA Today investigation of scoring anomalies in six states and Washington DC was inconclusive, and found compelling suggestions of impropriety in only one school. The US Department of Education's Office of Inspector General said on Jan. 7, 2013 that an investigation had found no evidence of widespread cheating on the DC Comprehensive Assessment System tests. It is likely that some cheating occurs, but some people cheat on their tax returns also, and the solution is not to abolish taxation.

Each state's progress on NCLB tests can be meaningfully compared. Even though tests are developed by states independently, state scores are compared with results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), ensuring each state's assessments are equally challenging and that gains in a state's test scores are valid.

State-mandated standardized tests help prevent "social promotion," the practice of allowing students to advance from grade to grade whether or not they have met the academic standards of their grade level. A Dec. 2004 paper by the Manhattan Institute for Policy Research found Florida's 2002 initiative to end social promotion, holding back students who failed year-end standardized tests, improved those students' scores by 9% in math and 4% in reading after one year.

Many objections voiced by the anti-testing movement are really objections to NCLB's use of test results, not to standardized tests themselves. Prominent testing critic Diane Ravitch, Research Professor of Education at New York University, concedes standardized testing has value: "Testing... is not the problem... information derived from tests can be extremely valuable, if the tests are valid and reliable." She cites the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) as a positive example, and says tests can "inform educational leaders and policy-makers about the progress of the education system as a whole."

Physicians, lawyers, real-estate brokers and pilots all take high-stakes standardized tests to ensure they have the necessary knowledge for their professions. If standardized tests were an unreliable source of data, their use would not be so widespread.

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

CON:

Standardized testing has not improved student achievement. After No Child Left Behind (NCLB) passed in 2002, the US slipped from 18th in the world in math on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) to 31st place in 2009, with a similar drop in science and no change in reading. A May 26, 2011, National Research Council report found no evidence test-based incentive programs are working: "Despite using them for several decades, policymakers and educators do not yet know how to use test-based incentives to consistently generate positive effects on achievement and to improve education."

Standardized tests are an unreliable measure of student performance. A 2001 study published by the Brookings Institution found that 50-80% of year-over-year test score improvements were temporary and "caused by fluctuations that had nothing to do with long-term changes in learning..."

Standardized tests are unfair and discriminatory against non-English speakers and students with special needs. English language learners take tests in English before they have mastered the language. [101] Special education students take the same tests as other children, receiving few of the accommodations usually provided to them as part of their Individualized Education Plans (IEP). . . .

"Teaching to the test" is replacing good teaching practices with "drill n' kill" rote learning. A five-year University of Maryland study completed in 2007 found "the pressure teachers were feeling to 'teach to the test'" since NCLB was leading to "declines in teaching higher-order thinking, in the amount of time spent on complex assignments, and in the actual amount of high cognitive content in the curriculum." . . .

Standardized tests are not objective. A paper published in the Fall 2002 edition of the peer-reviewed Journal of Human Resources stated that scores vary due to subjective decisions made during test design and administration: "Simply changing the relative weight of algebra and geometry in NAEP (the National Assessment of Educational Progress) altered the gap between black and white students." . . .

Older students do not take NCLB-mandated standardized tests seriously because they do not affect their grades. An English teacher at New Mexico's Valley High School said in Aug. 2004 that many juniors just "had fun" with the tests, making patterns when filling in the answer bubbles: "Christmas tree designs were popular. So were battleships and hearts." . . .

The multiple-choice format used on standardized tests is an inadequate assessment tool. It encourages a simplistic way of thinking in which there are only right and wrong answers, which doesn't apply in real-world situations. The format is also biased toward male students,

who studies have shown adapt more easily to the game-like point scoring of multiple-choice questions. . . .

Using test scores to reward and punish teachers and schools encourages them to cheat the system for their own gain. A 2011 USA Today investigation of six states and Washington DC found 1,610 suspicious anomalies in year-over-year test score gains. A confidential Jan. 2009 memo, prepared for the DC school system by an outside analyst and uncovered in Apr. 2013, revealed that 191 teachers in 70 DC public schools were "implicated in possible testing infractions," and nearly all the teachers at one DC elementary school "had students whose test papers showed high numbers of wrong-to-right erasures," according to USA Today. 178 Atlanta public school teachers from 44 schools were found to be cheating on standardized tests according to a July 2011 state report. At one school, teachers attended "weekend pizza parties" to correct students' answers, according to ABC News. . . .

Schools feeling the pressure of NCLB's 100% proficiency requirement are "gaming the system" to raise test scores, according to an Arizona State University report in the June 22, 2009, edition of the peer-reviewed International Journal of Education Policy & Leadership. Low-performing students are "encouraged to stay home" on test days or "counseled to quit or be suspended" before tests are administered. State education boards are "lowering the bar": manipulating exam content or scoring so that tests are easier for students to pass.

An obsession with testing robs children of their childhoods. NCLB's mandate begins in third grade, but schools test younger students so they will get used to taking tests. [13] Mar. 2009 research from the Alliance for Childhood showed "time for play in most public kindergartens has dwindled to the vanishing point, replaced by lengthy lessons and standardized testing." A three-year study completed in Oct. 2010 by the Gesell Institute of Human Development showed that increased emphasis on testing is making "children feel like failures now as early as PreK..."