

Pros and Cons of Standardized Testing



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Pros

1. Standardized testing holds teachers and schools accountable. Probably the greatest benefit of standardized testing is that teachers and schools are responsible for teaching students what they are required to know for these standardized tests. This is primarily because these scores become public record and teachers and schools who don't perform up to par can come under intense scrutiny. This scrutiny can lead to the loss of job and in some cases a school can be closed or taken over by the state.
2. Standardized testing gives teachers guidance to help them determine *what* to teach students and *when* to teach it. The net result is less wasted instructional time and a simplified way of timeline management.
3. Standardized testing gives parents a good idea of how their children are doing as compared to students across the country and locally. This can also indicate how your local area is doing compared against the national landscape.
4. Standardized testing allows students located in various schools, districts, and even states to be compared. Without standardized testing this comparison would not be possible. Public school students in the state of Texas are all required to take the same state standardized tests. This means that a student in Amarillo can be compared to a student in Dallas. Being able to accurately compare data is invaluable and is a major reason that the Common Core State Standards have been adopted. These will allow for a more accurate comparison between states.
5. Standardized testing is typically accompanied by a set of established standards or instructional framework which provide teachers with guidance for what and when something needs to be taught. Without this structure a third grade teacher and a sixth grade teacher could be teaching the same content. Having this guidance also keeps students who move from one school district to another from being behind or ahead their new school.
6. Standardized tests are objective in nature. Classroom grades given by a teacher are at the very least minimally subjective in nature. Standardized tests are often scored by computers or at the very least scored by people who do not directly know the student. They are also developed by experts and each question undergoes an intense process to remove bias.
7. Standardized tests provide accurate comparisons between sub-groups. These sub-groups can include data on ethnicity, socioeconomic status, special needs, etc. This provides schools with data to develop programs and services directed at improving scores in these sub-groups.

Cons

1. Standardized testing evaluates a student's performance on one particular day and does not take into account external factors. There are many people who simply do not perform well on tests. Many of these students are smart and understand the content, but it doesn't show on the test. Many students also develop test anxiety which hinders performance. Finally, there are so many external factors that play into test performance. If a student has an argument with their parents the morning of the test, chances are their focus isn't going to be where it should be.

2. Standardized testing causes many teachers to only “teach to the tests”. This practice can hinder a student’s overall learning potential. With the stakes getting higher and higher for teachers, this practice will only continue to increase. The sad reality is that it fosters an atmosphere that is boring and lacks creativeness. Teachers have such pressure to get their students ready for these exams that they neglect to teach students skills that go beyond the tests.
3. Standardized testing only evaluates the individual performance of the student instead of the overall growth of that student over the course of the year. Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) only focuses on whether a student is proficient at the time of testing. This does a disservice to both the teacher who worked hard to help their students grow and the student who worked extremely hard over the course of the year and improved tremendously, but failed to score proficient. Many would argue that teacher and student performance should be evaluated on growth over the course of the year instead of one single test performance.
4. Standardized testing can create a lot of stress on both educators and students. Excellent teachers quit the profession everyday because of how much stress is on them to prepare students to perform on standardized tests. Students especially feel the stress when there is something meaningful tied to them.
5. Many people say that though the answers are checked by computers, but in their inception they are made by a teacher who may be from a white or black population. So, what if the questions are made according to the teaching styles of a particular state? Won't that lead to a bias? It has been found that racial minorities have not been able to perform well in standardized tests. However, it has been found in the U.S. that Asian origin students have performed better in standardized tests. So, this argument remains a vague perception.
6. The success of the schools is dependent on the performance of their students. The federal funds are given only to those schools that perform well. This adds an extra pressure on public schools to constantly evaluate their performance. This often leads to unhealthy competition among the schools. The impacts of standardized tests on high school students have evoked a mixed response. Strict schedule and tough screening process prove to be a torture for some students. Though some adapt easily to standardized tests. These tests have been found to reduce group activities among students. Because the students spend a lot of time in preparing for standardized tests and therefore, skip the daily routines of playing and exercising.
7. There has been a misconception that students and kids with learning disabilities, such as dyslexia perform poorly in standardized tests. However, the fact is that disabled kids have performed better when they provided with necessary support and motivation. Standardized tests are recommended by some and disregarded by others. However, the fact is that every student goes through these tests sometime or the other in his/her academic career.
8. Some school systems are under great pressure to raise their scores so they have resorted to decreasing (and sometimes doing away with) time spent in recess. This can have negative impact on children’s social, emotional, and academic well-being.
9. Standardized tests can place a huge amount of stress on students and teachers alike. This can lead to negative health consequences as well as feelings of negativity directed at school and learning in general.