

Standardized Tests Role in the Academic Lives of Students and Teachers

Honors Capstone, Sacred Heart University

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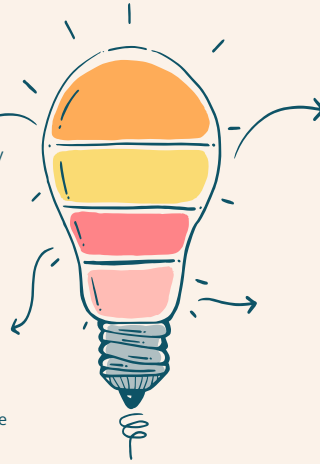
Introduction /Problem Statement

Across the United States, federal law has mandated standardized tests as annual exams in elementary school classrooms (Szolowicz, 2020). Both students and teachers are heavily evaluated based on standardized test scores which has been suggested to contribute to less direct educational time spent on non-tested subjects, and a tendency for teachers to shape curriculum towards the standardized test, rather than to the students in their classroom (Berwick, 2019; Morgan, 2016; Stefanko, 2021). Students suffer from increased pressure and anxiety that surrounds the topic of standardized testing (Felton & Akos, 2011). Research shows that standardized tests can inaccurately portray students' abilities (Stefanko, 2021). The use of standardized testing in the elementary classroom has contributed to a negative environment for students' learning and the instructor's method of teaching (Morgan, 2016). From problems identified in the research, and a perceived lack of support for teachers, educators and students around the United States are feeling the negative effects that standardized tests bring into the classroom in a very impactful way (Stefanko, 2021).



Research Tools

- Sacred Heart University Library Database
 - Education Research Complete
 - Educator's Reference Complete
 - ERIC
 - Professional Development Collection
 - Teacher Reference Center
- Google Scholar



Keywords

- Standardized tests effects on students
- Standardized tests effects on teacher
- Test anxiety
- High stakes exams

Analysis

- Using peer reviewed sources, I annotated articles, finding key details for my research
- I incorporated the research into my literature review
- Student and teacher sections

Literature Review & Major Findings

- The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 dramatically increased the prevalence of standardized testing at the elementary, middle, and high school level for students in public schools across the nation
- Standards and curriculum that are taught to students in the classroom do not always align with test questions
- The tests narrow down the curriculum to those bits that can be captured on a bubble sheet or in a short essay
- Classrooms have shifted from learning content, ideas, and skills to learning how to take a standardized test
- 20%-33% of all students experience standardized test anxiety
- A study found that students reported more overall test anxiety regarding the high-stakes exams versus typical in class exams
- Teachers were more likely to worry about how well their students would perform on high-stakes tests and less likely to worry about regular classroom tests
- Minority students, specifically students who are learning English, suffer the most from standardized testing in the classroom
- Despite the dedication to test preparation in classrooms, student test scores have not increased
- Low scores can lead to teacher layoffs and school closures
- State testing programs have resulted in increased job stress and lowered job satisfaction for teachers
- As a consequence of standardized tests being highly important, teachers may feel that it is necessary to align their instruction with the test and teach students more test preparation skills
- Teachers are deeply affected by the way standardized tests can take over their classroom procedures
- Teachers understand the clear message from school districts and officials that they are expected to teach specifically for the tests, or they can be terminated
- Research shows that many teachers decide to quit their public-school teaching job
- These teachers may begin to teach at a private school or leave the profession entirely to avoid the negative consequences and the pressure that is associated with standardized testing

Research Questions

1. Are standardized tests a fair and accurate representation of student's progress and achievement?
2. How are teachers affected by standardized tests in their classrooms?

- The time for change is now. We must listen to teachers and student's voices.
- Understanding teachers' experiences may help researchers to understand how to reduce teacher stress and burnout
- Students are more than just a test score and their full ability cannot be shown in a singular score
- Student assessment should include various forms of testing, class projects, self-reflections, research assignments, demonstrations, and displays
- Students need to be able to tell lawmakers and policymakers the changes that need to be made
- When students are given a voice, they can be the advocates for themselves
- Schools need to make an effort to create an environment for their students that exposes students to different ways of learning and approaching problems
- Students are the future and they each deserve to have equal opportunities to succeed. No student deserves to be at a disadvantage

Further Suggestions/Conclusions

- Students need to feel valued, accepted, and voice their own opinions and concerns about standardized tests
- School officials and test makers must learn from teachers experiences with standardized tests in the classroom
- Students and teachers should not be evaluated solely on test scores