

## Standardized Testing is Failing

By Audrey Austin and Allison Camper

As the school year is wrapping up, kids all over the United States are finishing off the year by taking their standardized tests. These tests are used to determine students' learning, growth, and progress. It also is a way to evaluate school districts, their education programs, their teachers, and compare class and student progress throughout a widespread area. They use the test results as a basis for data-driven instruction. But results from these tests have left people to wonder how these types of standardized tests are actually affecting teachers and students. People have started to question how accurate the tests they are giving and the information they are receiving really is.

Standardized testing has been a part of education in America since the mid-1800s. The first standardized test used was the Stanford-Binet Intelligence Test in 1916. It was a test used for an IQ test and later resulted in the development of the Scholar Aptitude Test (SAT) in 1926, created by the College Board. It wasn't until 2002 when a huge increase of use in these tests was put into place. The increase occurred because the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) made it mandatory for all fifty states to annually provide students with standardized tests. In addition to that, a decision made by the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) made it so that students (specifically in Ohio) who are in grades third through eighth are required to take Math and English Language Arts Ohio State Tests (OST). High School students are required to take a total of seven End Of Course tests which are graded on a one to five scale. Students are given the opportunity to score thirty five points, which would require getting a five on all seven tests but they are only required to score a combined minimum of eighteen points to graduate. Typically within a student's junior or senior year of high school, students take other standardized tests such

as the SAT and American College Test (ACT), which are meant to be used and looked at by colleges and universities. The ACT is run by a nonprofit organization which is also called ACT; it covers the skills a student has within the four areas of English, Math, Reading, and Scientific Reasoning.

Although these tests may seem good for children to take in terms of the state's education, many parents and teachers do not like these standardized tests because they feel that they are inaccurate and biased. Many questions on the standardized tests “are not always fair” according to Jeremy Kline, an Algebra 1 teacher at Wickliffe High School. He feels that “instead of determining if a student understands a concept, they attempt to trick the student instead.” This leads to students' knowledge being viewed and scored in an inaccurate way which doesn't make sense. “You wouldn't standardize athletes so why would you standardize tests?” says Mr. Bezzeg, an English teacher at Perry High School. These tests leave out and cannot see the important creativity, critical thinking, and artistic abilities a student may have. These abilities simply cannot be measured within standardized tests. Instead they are only able to record a student's rote knowledge on the four subjects that they are tested on. Based on results teachers cannot adjust teaching methods because the test only shows the general knowledge of an individual student. The tests can be seen as inaccurate due to the fact that the standardized tests are not the same as how a classroom is typically set. Alan Iacofano, a history teacher at Perry High School, explained how, “I get some kids with a bad grade who does really good and kids with a really good grade do bad sometimes.”

Teachers are also affected by test scores, as their teaching abilities are judged from the scores by the state. This causes many teachers to feel pressure to “teach to the test” instead of properly instructing their students. Iacofano expressed that “I don't like the pressure of preparing

kids for a state exam... I don't like being boxed in with the time frame we have to prepare kids for the test." Instead of using valuable class time to make sure students conceptually understand lessons, teachers have to devote days to EOC preparation and review. Many teachers must get off topic or jump around lessons for these state tests. It's not enjoyable for students because jumping around too much could be confusing; it could also cause some units and topics to be left out because it doesn't fit in the "time frame" that testing teachers are required to teach within. Kline expressed that "test scores totally dictate my lesson plan" and there are even "times I have to speed up things in order to make sure I accomplish this, rather than taking the time to make sure the majority of the students can show mastery of a concept." Due to how unorganized these classes can be, it's evident that a student's test score is more their own responsibility than how their teacher is actually teaching it. "Two years ago, I had some of the best test scores I ever had, not because of me, but because of the group of students I had," says Mr Bezzeg, "I hadn't taught any differently than the classes before them."

"I understand that they must make sure there's a standard, but how can there be a standard for giving kids what they need." Having every single child take the same standardized test is not a good measure of improvement and intelligence when not every student is given the same opportunities. The tests can be especially challenging for non-native English speakers. Any child living in a non-English speaking household is considered an "English learner" to the OBE, and are given some accommodations along with students with 504 plans. But these "accommodations" usually only apply to the first year of testing, on non ELA tests. Wendy Camper, the curriculum director of Painesville School District agrees that the accommodations aren't enough. "Imagine you are 8 years old, you were born here, but you only speak English at school with your teacher, and now you have to take an ELA and math test in English with no

translation, how is that fair?” A student born in an English-speaking household who went to a good preschool is set up to score better, when the only help the English learner student is given is a printed dictionary to look up Spanish words. “How is that at all an accurate measure of the teacher’s abilities, or the student’s intelligence?” The student who failed because they are still learning English, could be far more intelligent than the student who started reading at 3 years old, but that's not what the test results show. “Many low performing students and districts [are] being forced to test more to prove we are teaching, [which] means we end up teaching less, or teaching to the test... while the students learn nothing.”

Outside of state regulations, every year more and more colleges are becoming “test optional” schools. This simply means that colleges no longer require your ACT/SAT score to be submitted with your application. This practice was started during the pandemic and is becoming permanent, over 70% of colleges and universities did not require scores for their 2023 applicants. Even the Ivies aren't requiring test scores for the next few years of students including Columbia, Cornell, Brown, and Harvard. Many universities argue exam scores can contribute to inequities in admissions, and students having the opportunity to leave them out increases their confidence and widens their options when applying to schools. Two test scores are not an accurate reflection of a student’s academic performance and capabilities, and schools are focusing more on students' extracurriculars and involvement at their school.

So will standardized tests become a thing of the past? It is hard to tell. Many school districts and teachers are already against the practice, because it is an unfair measure that frequently gets in the way of students' education. Many teachers are brainstorming ways to give these tests some type of purpose and make it actually beneficial. Kline feels that to make something good out of these tests “there also needs to be opportunities for students to see their

results and to understand what they should have done correctly. This way the test becomes a learning tool and not just a number that gets published in the media that determines if a school is good or not.” Students are being “tested too much” with no purpose. In addition to how the teachers feel, students themselves would be more than happy to see them go. But the reality is that every single student comes from a different background, and has different abilities and struggles unique to every individual. Many teachers including Kline tries to help students like this by “not to put too much stress on [the] students and reassuring them that as long as they have been putting in the work all year long that they will perform well.” A few standardized tests is a completely inaccurate way to judge the education a student is really getting.