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The Imperfection of Standardized Testing

Standardized testing, such as the ACT and SAT, is a common test that thousands of students take every year when applying for college. While most higher level learning institutions require standardized testing for admission, these tests do not accurately assess a student's ability to succeed in college and beyond. This type of testing may help someone get into the college of their choice; however, they are unrealistic predictors of success. Some say that standardized testing effectiveness demonstrates a student's grade level. While in some cases, that may be true, a single test will not accurately predict a college student's overall success. Standardized testing are not reliable in measuring a student's performance, as they put too much pressure on students to perform well, and they also put significant pressure on educators in high school as well.

Standardized testing is not a reliable or appropriate way to measure a student's performance. While many believe that standardized tests are an objective measurement of student achievement, I believe one day's worth of testing doesn't show how smart or successful a student is. It may show where a student's strengths and weaknesses are in some subjects like English and math; however, they could have just made a simple mistake in figuring out an answer for a question. These tests are unreasonable due to the amount of hours a student puts in for a test that will only last for several hours. Their 4 year's worth of studying and practicing throughout high school is a more accurate reflection of their knowledge and performance. William Hiss, the former Dean of Admissions at Bates College proves that high school grades matter more than standardized tests. He led a study which tracked the grades and graduation

rates of college students who submitted their standardized test results against those who did not over several years. The data showed that “a student’s performance in college closely mirrored their performance in high school: Students with strong grade point averages in high school maintained similar GPAs in college, regardless of how well or poorly they scored on college entrance exams” (Michelle Maitre, par 4). Hiss states, “The evidence of the study clearly shows that high school GPA matters. Four-year, long-term evidence of self-discipline, intellectual curiosity and hard work; that’s what matters the most” (par 7). In other words, a GPA earned from four years of hard work, studying and classes is more important than one single test grade.

Not only is standardized testing unreliable, it also puts too much pressure on students to perform well on the test, which can lead to test anxiety and distress and ultimately hurt their performance. While it is true that some students do not feel overly stressed when taking exams, test anxiety does impact many students’ performance, including myself. Since this test score can either help or hurt someone’s chances to get into their preferred college, the anxiety and stress levels increase significantly as they prepare for the test. Dr. Thomas Armstrong, Executive Director of the American Institute for Learning and Human Development, states that “standardized tests create stress. Some kids do well with a certain level of stress. Other students fold” (par 10). In the same paragraph, he says, “Brain research suggests that too much stress becomes overwhelming, the brain shifts into a ‘fight or flight’ response, where it is impossible to engage in high order thinking processes that are necessary to respond correctly to the standardized test questions.” To summarize, standardized testing impacts the brain negatively, and results in too much pressure and stress for students who take the test. Students shouldn’t be required to take these tests; it should be optional for students.

Finally, students aren’t the only people under pressure; educators feel significant pressure and stress themselves. For example, Dr. Thomas Armstrong mentions they are under

pressure “because teachers know that test scores may affect their salaries and job security” (par 3). In other words, teachers feel the need to make sure that they teach their students the right material in order for them to do well on the test. Otherwise, their salary or their job might change due to their students’ scores, and how these scores impact their high school’s ranking. Some educators insist that preparing students for these tests motivates students to excel, while focusing on essential content and skills. Despite their good intentions, studies show this not to be the case. For example, a five-year University of Maryland study completed in 2007 showed that “the pressure teachers were feeling to ‘teach the test’ led 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” (procon.org, par 13). Again, this supports the claim that too much emphasis is placed on standardized test results, leading educators to focus on test preparation over many weeks. This negatively impacts students, as most of the classroom time consists of preparing for the test, instead of learning anything new, useful, or important. In addition, according to Dr. Thomas Armstrong, these standardized tests “only tests reading, math, and science that means that art, social studies, physical education, history, and other subjects are given far less attention than used to be the case” (par 8). Therefore, teachers are focusing on subjects relevant to the tests, while other important subjects are neglected.

Based on the presented arguments, standardized testing should not be a requirement for college admission, as they are not reliable in measuring a student’s performance, and add too much pressure and anxiety on students and educators alike. One test score is not a reliable way to measure a student’s potential success in college. That student’s high school GPA, which was earned through four years of hard work and studying is a more accurate reflection of how a student will perform at college. These tests aren’t healthy for students, as they have been shown to lead to extreme anxiety leading up to and during the test. Educators suffer also,

as they are pressured to focus most of their time on test preparation, while neglecting other important subjects that aren't on the test. To conclude, college admission time is both exciting and stressful for students. Standardized tests only add to that stress, and shouldn't be a requirement for measuring a student's potential to succeed in college.

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