

## **Standardized Testing**

### **House Committee on Education and the Workforce**

Standardized testing is a convention that began in the 1800s in America and has been a popular method of normalized testing since ancient times. The debate over the issue lies mainly around their importance in the educational system. Currently, they are used as “high risk” assessments, where students can get held back and teachers can get fired if students perform poorly. This is leading to methods to “teach by the test,” where students are not necessarily getting better at the subject, just learning to take the test better.

As the government increased and reemphasized standardized testing, the world ranking for the United States went down in education. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was approved in 1969, which provided funding to support elementary and secondary education. A report, “A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform,” was issued by the Reagan Administration. This report aimed to describe the current downward spiral in education, and steps to raise the academic standards. In 2001, President George W. Bush enacted the No Child Left Behind Act, which increased focus on standardized testing and added quantitative consequences. In this system, in grades 3-8, and then 10, there would be a yearly math and science standardized test. If Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) was not met by a school, it would be shut down. The goal of this act was to make all student pass with a proficient score by 2014, but this goal was not met. According to a study in the journal Science, the extent of the failure to meet this goal was so large that in California, nearly 100% of schools failed to meet the AYP in 2014. During the time of this act, the government spending on education also increased from \$423 million to \$1.1 billion.

Since then, there have been many pushes to overhaul NCLB. President Obama has signed a new education law, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), on December 10, 2015. This reauthorizes ESEA and overhauls NCLB. President Obama had suggested this act in 2010, seeing that the goals set in NCLB were getting out of hand, but saw that NCLB helped the government know where their funding in education needed to be focused. Two more acts, the TEST Act of 2014 and the Student Testing and Accountability Act have also been enacted to change the incentive and standardized test taking structure.

The main controversy on the subject of standardized testing is whether the pros outweigh the cons. Supporters of standardized testing believe that it levels the playing field between schools, to ensure the same students in the same class at different schools do not learn different things. This would get rid of any advantage that one child has above another just because he/she went to a different school, because all public schools should be the same. On the other hand, because of the strong disincentives such as losing your job or the school closing down, some schools are training teachers to teach by the exam. In this way students are not learning what is meant to be taught in the class, rather the class is one year of learning how to take the test at the end of the class. Standardized tests are also thought to decrease a child’s curiosity in the topic because of the forced memorization of the test.

The Democratic point of view on this issue is that Common Core and standardized testing is a positive thing that stimulates the growth of schools and the standards of the country, as opposed to individual states having their own standards. This normalizes the nation to be on the same page on average. On the other hand, Republicans believe that these issues are infringing on states’ rights and should be stopped. They believe that this approach is not working and standardizing the students to all be trained for multiple choice or fill in the blank questions, as opposed to real world

skills. This would make it so they are not suited for the real world, and have limited analytical skills which are actually important outside of the tests.

#### Questions to Consider:

1. Should standardized testing be continued to be used?
2. Would the usage/removal of standardized testing increase or decrease America's global ranking in education?
3. What policies would benefit the education system in the USA?
4. How does the education system here compare to the top rankers in the world?
5. Would any of those systems work in the USA?
6. If standardized testing is removed, how would the intelligence or learning of students be known?
7. To what extent should test taking skills play a role in a student's future?
8. How would succeeding because of test taking skills in school have an effect on the knowledge needed for the standardized test in the future?

#### Additional Research:

1. TEST Act of 2014- <https://www.congress.gov/bill/113th-congress/house-bill/5612>
2. Student Testing Improvement and Accountability Act- <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/452>
3. ESSA- <http://www.ed.gov/essa>
4. NCLB- <http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml>