



## Pros and Cons of Standardized Testing

written by: Margie • edited by: SForsyth



While standardized testing is stressful and time-consuming, it can also be very beneficial. In the following article, some of the positive and negative factors are discussed.

Standardized testing is a subject that many people feel strongly about. Most people either think that it is the best way to assess students' abilities or it is a stress-invoking nightmare for everyone involved.

However, if you step back and look at it objectively, it becomes clear that it is neither. Standardized testing has both positive and negative aspects and when used effectively can play a significant role in bettering the education of our students. The key, of course, is using the results *effectively*.

### Positive Aspects of Standardized Testing

- 1) 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.
- 2) 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.
- 3) Standardized testing allows students' progress to be tracked over the years. When students take the same type of test yearly (adjusted for grade level) it is easy to see if a student is improving, losing ground academically, or staying about the same. (For example, if a child is in the 75th percentile in the sixth grade and the 80th percentile in the seventh grade, you can see that the child is gaining ground in school.) This helps determine how a child is doing academically.
- 4) Since all students in a school are taking the same test (with respect to grade level) standardized tests provide an accurate comparison across groups. (For example, this makes it easy to see how boys are performing as compared to girls in a particular school or district.) Over the years great improvements have been made with regards to test bias, which has led to more accurate assessments and comparisons.

### Negative Aspects of Standardized Testing

- 1) Many teachers are (unjustly) accused of "teaching to the test". Teachers rarely do this, but there is pressure to focus on topics that will likely be on a standardized test, often at the expense of other important topics that will not likely be tested.
- 2) 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.
- 3) 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.
- 4) As much as test creators try to do away with testing bias, it may be impossible to rid tests of it altogether. I once tutored a 5<sup>th</sup> grader who did not know what a recipe was. If a standardized test was to ask questions directed at a recipe, that child would have been at a huge disadvantage because most fifth grade students know and have had at least some experience dealing with recipes, but she did not. There is just no way to know for certain that every child being tested has a fair amount of knowledge going into the test.

### **Standardized Testing Uses:**

The key student success on standardized tests is balance. Those in charge need to step back and take into account both the good and the bad things about testing and find a way to help students succeed without causing them too much stress. So, will there ever be an end to the constant back and forth between testing advocates and those against standardized testing? It's hard to say, but I feel relatively certain that for better or worse, standardized testing is here to stay. I believe the key is to use the test results as a guide for teachers, parents, and students. They should also be used, *in a limited capacity*, to assess how well schools are doing. Standardized testing certainly should be used to help measure a school's success, but it should be *one* assessment among *several* that determines whether a school's students are progressing or not.