

http://www.thenewsdspatch.com/columnists/article_a06f3518-f9cf-565e-9de5-f4c99f32420b.html

In the Middle: Are Standardized Tests Worth it?

Jun 6, 2018



Nelly Serrano

Each spring, students across America are required to take standardized tests to show what they have learned that school year and to measure their knowledge. But are standardized tests really helping students improve and preparing them for the future?

In 2002, the NCLB (No Child Left Behind) law mandated annual testing in all 50 states. But over the next 10 years, the United States went from a ranking of 18th in the world in math, to 27th in 2012. Also, an article by “Newsweek” states that over these years, students’ creativity levels decreased.

Teachers say they are focused on teaching students what they need to know for standardized tests, which doesn't help students or the education system.

Educators have other concerns, too. Results of the tests are often returned months later, when the student has a different teacher. The scores provide very few specifics for teachers about what the students learned and didn't learn. In addition, there are concerns that standardized tests may not be fair. Students who have moved to the U.S. from another country may still need to master the language. The tests also don't measure diversity; students from many backgrounds are not all identical in their understanding of a question.

Scoring is also controversial. People who grade the tests usually make \$11 to \$13 an hour and only need a bachelor's degree not necessarily related to education. Some scorers are paid per paper, which may mean test scorers are racing to grade as many papers as possible to make more money. Scorers' mental or emotional state may make them grade tests differently day to day.

Standardized testing is expensive. The costs are placing a burden on state education budgets. According to the Texas education agency, the state spent \$9 million just to take the tests! If only one state is \$9 million imagine all 50 states put together!

So what is the alternative? Canada, Sweden and Finland don't require standardized testing until middle school. (Students from Finland aren't required to take standardized tests at all, and are the highest ranked in the world!) The United States is now the most tested on earth, requiring students from grades 3 through 8 to take standardized tests annually, and more than twice a year in high school.

In conclusion, standardized tests are not useful and the best solution may be to come up with a new way to show what the students have learned. Like the students in Finland, for example. Students should be encouraged to learn instead of having to work so hard just to prepare for a test that will "measure their smartness."

Nelly Serrano is a student at Barker Middle School. In the Middle is a regular column produced by MCAS middle school students.