

None of the Above

A NEW APPROACH TO TESTING AND ASSESSMENT

Standardized testing can be deeply beneficial to students, teachers, and schools by providing an important measure of progress, as well as meaningful feedback about areas of success and areas of growth. As teachers, we know the costs and benefits of assessments. This leaves us between two sides of an often-heated debate, but this is where the evidence leads us. In short, tests have value—so let's take advantage of them. Here is how:

DESIGN: IMPROVE THE ACCURACY OF STANDARDIZED ASSESSMENTS

A large body of research shows that well-designed standardized tests can provide valuable information about students' knowledge and teachers' performance. In fact, such tests are often predictive of long-term life outcomes. It is essential to ensure that all standardized tests are well-designed and that feedback from teachers is solicited during all stages of the testing process.

A common concern is that the accuracy of assessments is undermined by excessive "teaching to the test," which does not contribute to meaningful learning. However, there is little evidence that test preparation even produces significantly higher test scores when tests are well-designed and focused on higher-order skills. Teachers and principals should be strongly discouraged from teaching to the test because it neither raises test scores nor results in genuine learning.

Computer-adaptive testing is an important tool for improving the accuracy of assessments. Such tests do a better job than traditional assessments of measuring both high- and low-achieving students, and should be made widely available for adoption.

Finally, ensuring the quality of state-created tests is an iterative process. The vast majority of state test items should be released publicly so that stakeholders, such as teachers and parents, can offer feedback on the exams.

CULTURE: CREATE AND MAINTAIN A POSITIVE TESTING ENVIRONMENT IN SCHOOLS

In some schools, the negative culture surrounding standardized testing is pervasive, undermining the value of assessments and harming teachers' morale and students' motivation. A truly pernicious culture can lead to cheating. As educators, we must work within our schools to create a positive culture that recognizes the value of testing for learning and growth. Best practices should be instituted to deter, detect, and investigate potential instances of cheating.

Policymakers must address the negative impact of excessive testing by getting an accurate measure of time spent on assessment and eliminating unnecessary tests. Moreover, the use of alternate assessments, including holistic, portfolio-based exams, should be studied to determine whether they are compatible with data-driven improvement and accountability.

TEACHING: USE DATA TO IMPROVE INSTRUCTION

The data from standardized tests can serve as an important tool for teachers and administrators. Research suggests that both teachers and schools benefit from thoughtful use of data. Data-driven instruction can be improved in a variety of ways, including: ongoing professional development for teachers; a dedicated data specialist in each school; and data that is returned to teachers in a timely, disaggregated, and accessible manner.

ACCOUNTABILITY: INCLUDE DATA IN CRITICAL DECISIONS

Because test scores are important reflections of student learning, assessment data should be a part of consequential decisions. In fact, there is a large body of literature showing the benefits of using tests as part of a multiple measure accountability framework. However, tests should never be the sole basis for any high-stakes decision. For example, the current system of denying graduation to any student who does not pass all Regents exams is misguided and should be revised to incorporate multiple measures.

Furthermore, when connecting student test scores to teacher performance, special care must be taken to isolate the effect of teachers and exclude the multitude of factors outside teachers' control that affect student performance.

Teachers of traditionally non-tested subjects should be evaluated using growth measures or student learning objectives on assessments that are designed with significant input from educators.

CONCLUSION

We believe in the value of standardized assessments when they are used carefully. They can be a critical tool for teachers and students alike, and we would be unwise to discard them. At the same time, policymakers, administrators, and teachers must invest the time, money, reflection, and work necessary to realize the value of assessments.

Educators 4 Excellence
New York

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Educators 4 Excellence (E4E), a teacher-led organization, is changing this dynamic by placing the voices of teachers at the forefront of the conversations that shape our classrooms and careers.

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These recommendations were created by a group of classroom teachers who met over the course of two months to review research and collaborate on how to improve testing in schools. Learn more and read the full report at E4E.org/NYTesting.