

HIGH-STAKES STANDARDIZED TESTS

A partial list of problems with standardized, machine-scored tests--problems which should be addressed before such tests are used to determine student life chances, establish teacher pay and reputation, trigger school closings, affect real estate values, and so on.

Commercially produced, standardized, machine-scored tests:

1. Provide minimal to no useful feedback to classroom teachers
2. Are keyed to a deeply flawed curriculum adopted in 1893
3. Lead to neglect of physical conditioning, music, art, and other, non-verbal ways of learning
4. Unfairly advantage those who can afford test prep
5. Hide problems created by margin-of-error computations in scoring
6. Penalize test-takers who think in non-standard ways (which the young frequently do)
7. Radically limit teacher ability to adapt to learner differences
8. Give control of the curriculum to test manufacturers
9. Encourage use of threats, bribes, and other extrinsic motivators
10. Use arbitrary, subjectively-set pass-fail cut scores
11. Produce scores which can be (and sometimes are) manipulated for political purposes
12. Assume that what the young will need to know in the future is already known
13. Emphasize minimum achievement to the neglect of maximum performance
14. Create unreasonable pressures to cheat
15. Reduce teacher creativity and the appeal of teaching as a profession
16. Are unavoidably biased by social-class, ethnic, regional, and other cultural differences
17. Lessen concern for and use of continuous evaluation
18. Have no “success in life” predictive power
19. Unfairly channel instructional resources to learners at or near the pass-fail “cut score”
20. Are open to massive scoring errors with life-changing consequences
21. Are at odds with deep-seated American values about individuality and worth
22. Create unnecessary stress and negative attitudes toward learning
23. Perpetuate the artificial compartmentalization of knowledge by field
24. Channel increasing amounts of tax money into corporate coffers instead of classrooms
25. Waste the vast, creative potential of human variability
26. Block instructional innovations that cannot be evaluated by machine
27. Unduly reward mere ability to retrieve secondhand information from memory
28. Subtract from available instructional time
29. Lend themselves to “gaming”—use of strategies to improve the success-rate of guessing
30. Make time—a parameter largely unrelated to ability—a factor in scoring
31. Create test fatigue, aversion, and an eventual refusal to take tests seriously
32. Enforced secrecy shields test publisher from accountability
33. Undermine a fundamental democratic principle that those closest to the work are best-positioned to evaluate its quality
34. Simply don’t work. The National Academy of Sciences, 2011 report to Congress says that the use of standardized tests “has not increased student achievement.”

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