

The Case for Standardized Testing



By Nikkee Porcaro

Talk to any teacher and you'll hear strong opinions on the topic of standardized testing. "It's blatantly unfair!" opponents cry. "Teaching to the test ruins schools!" The proponents then chime in: "How else can we accurately measure large numbers of students? How do we ensure students applying to college are actually college-ready?"

In this and next month's column, I'll break down the pros and cons of standardized testing. Since testing is optional at some colleges, looking at non-traditional options could be best for your student. Alternatively, maybe your student should go through the good ol' SAT/ACT wringer that you had to, many moons ago.

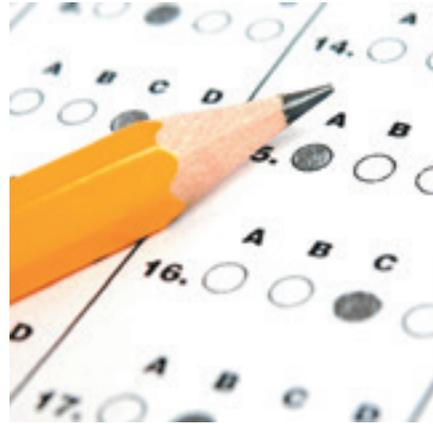
As a strong test taker myself and someone who has worked on these tests daily for the past decade, I have no problem with them — *when they are used as one piece of the puzzle*. Below are the specific reasons I see the value in standardized testing.

1. High schoolers who get As and Bs on their report cards, yet can't read at a high school level or do seventh grade math. I see this all the time: Students with lofty report cards whose skills don't match up. How can this be? Well, public schools often count other factors into their grades fairly heavily, like homework completion, participation, effort, and group projects, which can skew the student's true mastery. Private schools can do the same, but also sometimes feel added pressure from high-tuition-paying parents to inflate grades.

Finally, some students may have done well at the time in certain subjects but have let their skills fall off due to lack of practice. How can a student struggling to read at a high school level or find the area of a triangle expect to ace a college-level humanities or calculus course? The SAT and ACT allow schools to check for a basic skill level (testing skills students have learned by 10th or 11th grade) to set the student up for college success.

2. Standardized tests are used in numerous disciplines to ensure mastery, safety, and compliance. Good grades do not necessarily mean a person has mastered. I would not feel comfortable giving

a surgeon a knife to slice me open just because his or her grades at Some Medical School were As and Bs. Nor would I hire a lawyer to defend my innocence without a degree from a strong law school, which is hard to achieve without top LSAT scores. Just because a student is in high school doesn't mean there shouldn't be basic standards to adhere to.



Standardized tests level the playing field. There are millions of kids, teachers, schools, and classes in the United States. At my company, No Anxiety Prep, we have tutored students in 12 states and five countries, and we've seen endless grading systems, class titles, and GPA systems. How can anyone say an A at a Local

Public High School X is the same as an A at a science and math magnet school in Silicon Valley?

Efficiency in the college applications process. How can schools like Michigan or Maryland go through 30,000 to 50,000 applications without some initial metric for culling those numbers? Unfortunately, with college applications on the rise but budgets staying stagnant, hiring more help is out of the question for most schools. They need a metric to decide which applications are worth a read, and which applicants do not meet their standards.

Overall, standardized tests should be one piece of the puzzle in evaluating a student. Any reputable university will look at the student holistically, understanding that test scores are one factor (albeit a worthwhile one to look at) in a complicated and diverse review process.

Next month: The Case Against Standardized Testing

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