# Annotated Bibliography for Standardized Tests

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Everyone is affected by the strength or weakness of our educational system, from the students and their ability to succeed in college and in the workplace, to the employers who hire them—and everyone in between. Every taxpayer is a stakeholder in education, because these tests are paid for by tax dollars, and the return on investment in education is not where it should be. Standardized tests should be abolished and replaced with end-of-year subject tests because they will save time and money, lead to increased mastery of core subjects, and diminish dropout rates.

Clemmitt, M. (2007, July 13). Students under stress. CQ Researcher, 17, 577–600. Retrieved from http://library.cqpress.com/cqresearcher/

This article discusses the pressure that students face in public schools today. Homework has increased, as has stress caused by high-stakes standardized testing. This type of pressure results in less time for children to play, sleep, and interact with their parents. The solution is to limit the time children spend on homework, but given that American students lag behind their international peers in tests of basic subjects, decreasing schoolwork seems not to be the answer. Although Clemmitt is a journalist and not an expert on the subject, she cites many experts and authoritative sources to lend credibility to the article, including books and surveys from education researchers and college professors. The article provides a balanced view of homework with arguments from experts across the country.

My assessment: The article indicates that standardized testing discourages teachers, and the pressure to perform on these tests results in teachers transferring the pressure onto their students. This idea can be used to support the argument that these tests reduce schools to test-taking institutions.

Hillocks, G. (2002). *The testing trap: How state writing assessments control learning.* New York, NY: Teachers College Press.

Hillocks, a University of Chicago professor of English and an author of several books and articles on teaching and writing, investigated writing assessment in five states and interviewed state test officials, teachers, and administrators in six districts in each state. He developed a comprehensive picture of writing instruction and the “organized blether” (p. 80) seen as good writing. Nine conclusions resulted from Hillocks’ investigation: including the finding that the standard five-paragraph essay taught in these schools is detrimental to students’ growth as writers, because tests teach students that any reasons used to support ideas don’t warrant further examination for consistency, impact, or relevance. Writing tests impose a way of thinking during the timed writing that removes the necessity of critical thought; teachers do not practice revision or drafting stages of the writing process. Testing drives the curriculum in writing courses toward formulaic thinking and writing.

My assessment: This book will be used to underscore the idea that standardized tests in writing that Hillocks examined had a negative effect on students, and that has not changed in the years since the book was published. Hillocks’ ideas will be used in the sections where I will report on the history of standardized tests and how they have driven the curriculum, with negative effects.

McNeil, L., & Valenzuela, A. (2001). The harmful impact of the TAAS system of testing in Texas: Beneath the accountability rhetoric. In M. Kornhaber & G. Orfield (Eds.), *Raising standards or raising barriers? Inequality and high stakes testing in public education* (pp.127–150). New York, NY: Century Foundation.

McNeil, a professor of education at Rice University in Texas, and Valenzuela, a professor of education at the University of Texas, have written extensively on writing and assessment, and in this study investigated the writing assessment in their state, the Texas Assessment of Academic Skills (TAAS). They found that TAAS lowers the quality of teaching in the areas tested and particularly affects—in a very negative way—students from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Plus, the time spent teaching and learning about subjects not tested by TAAS suffers, because many schools in urban areas spend considerable time just teaching what is tested. The lowest levels of information are taught, leaving many students disengaged. The test was once seen as a reform of the educational system but according to the authors, TAAS is not the answer and only benefits companies who produce test-taking materials.

My assessment: This study will be used to establish common ground and to recognize the opposing view that standardized tests like the TAAS had good intentions—to help reform education and improve learning. However, not only did it fail to do so, but it also negatively affected the quality of teaching and student learning. It reaches some of the same conclusions that Hillocks’ study did, so the negative aspects of standardized testing will be supported in my project by more than one expert source.

Onosko, J. (2011). Race to the Top leaves children and future citizens behind. *Democracy & Education, 19*(2), 1–11. Retrieved from http://democracyeducationjournal.org/home/

Onosko’s article is about the Race to the Top (RTT) program and its negative effects regarding education in general and students in particular. Although it had good intentions—to increase accountability, raise standards, and reward improvement—it has only led to more problems. He explains eight weaknesses of RTT, including the argument that high-stakes tests endorsed by this initiative have not achieved the goal of raising students’ math and reading test scores. Also, this initiative created the conditions for the Atlanta teachers cheating scandal; moreover, it lowers teachers’ morale, provides a disincentive to enter the teaching profession, and limits the development of students’ full intellectual potential. Onosko, who is a professor of education at the University of New Hampshire and wrote this article for the peer-reviewed journal *Democracy & Education*, foresees further devastating consequences unless the course of RTT is changed.

My assessment: This article about the Race to the Top (RTT) initiative will help to support several of the points in my paper. I will use the Atlanta teachers as a specific example and an appeal to reason. The cheating scandal that is identified in this article resulted from the environment of rewards and punishment created in many school districts from this initiative. Also, ideas from this article will help me in detailing the history of the problem of RTT, as well as its effects on teachers and their profession.

Ravitch, D. (2011). Dictating to the schools: A look at the effect of the Bush and Obama administration on schools. *Education Digest, 76*(8), 4–9. Retrieved from http://www.eddigest.com/

New York University education Professor Ravitch is an outspoken critic of the assessments that have come out of the Bush and Obama administrations, which is intriguing, given that she used to be a government education official (Assistant Secretary of Education) when Bush was in office. So she comes from a unique position to offer her arguments regarding government policies on education, which have led the public to believe that our schools are failing, when any failures are the direct result of legislation that funds standardized testing, most recently with Race to the Top (RTT). RTT creates competition between states to raise test scores and receive the financial rewards. There is no evidence that these tests or the reforms that they have engendered have improved the quality of education; on the contrary, these tests measure a narrow set of skills, and teachers focus on these skills because their annual performance evaluations are partly determined by students’ test scores. In the future, she argues, we should expect more cheating and “gaming” the system, as well as less time and attention spent on any subject not directly tested, such as science and history. Students are improving in test-taking strategies and not math and reading; the number of college students taking remediation courses in these subjects has not decreased. Tests should be used to diagnose problems and help students, not as a carrots-and-sticks strategy.

My assessment: This article will be used when I present the history of standardized tests. The No Child Left Behind legislation in the Bush administration, followed by Race to the Top in the Obama administration, have made standardized tests front and center in the national conversation about education, and the negative effects of these tests will be discussed using Ravitch’s ideas. Though they had good intentions, these tests have not fulfilled the promise of raising the quality of education in our schools, and have instead left a trail of broken promises, high school dropouts, and no substantial returns on investment. Our children have been left behind and are falling to the bottom of the heap.