

I have been serving as an educator in Ohio since 2010, with the opportunity to work with students and colleagues as a classroom teacher, an athletic coach, and an adviser to extracurricular organizations. Furthermore, my experiences have led to an extensive professional and personal network. Over the last decade, I have witnessed an educational environment that has become increasingly impacted by standardized testing. The most troubling thing about this environment is that the wide range of effects it has produced runs counter to many of the goals that have been laid out by educators, policymakers, organized groups, and employers. These goals include developing skills to be college and career ready in an ever changing world, closing the achievement gap in education, providing enriching opportunities, and protecting mental health.

Due to the roles I have played in education at this point in my career, I have the most first hand experience with the effects on instruction and curriculum caused by the increased use of standardized testing. Overall, the most significant issue I have witnessed is the “one size fits all” approach to the educational needs of students across the state of Ohio. The necessity to limit curriculum to the content of a single assessment ignores the importance of focusing on strengths, weaknesses, and potential of individual students. Furthermore, the heavy reliance on standardized testing has led to a disproportionate emphasis on outdated skills, such as memorization, and left out the development of skills identified as essential in the modern era, such as problem solving, creativity, and collaboration. Finally, the pandemic has produced a number of important lessons in all areas of society, and education is no exception. The cancelation of testing in the spring of 2020 has in no way negatively affected planning, instruction, or curriculum for the 2020-21 school year. Furthermore, in a normal school year, there is so much lag between the administration of tests and any data or feedback that it becomes irrelevant. This is something we must remember as we continue to move past the pandemic.

Standardized testing is also creating a growing and unnecessary burden on educators because of the various resources it consumes, an issue that is even more magnified in districts that are not as fortunate as mine. For example, my district spent weeks maneuvering Chrome books from building to building in order to successfully implement tests, which created limitations for the classroom activities around the district, as well as shortages of devices for students in study halls. However, the resource that is strained the most as a result of standardized testing is time. First, the timing of testing creates a situation that often leads to the rushing of content with little long term comprehension or application, followed by a month long period where instruction becomes disorganized and fragmented in an attempt to go back and fill in content that was abbreviated. Second, the total duration of testing leads to a couple weeks of shortened instruction periods, an issue that particularly affects AP students that are preparing for an AP test in an attempt to earn a college credit for their participation in the course and require time with their instructor. In the spring of 2021 my

AP United States Government students lost the equivalent of just over 14 instructional periods to testing, which resulted in us creating optional Zoom sessions on the weekends, which is an option that is a little more realistic in a community setting like mine.

The importance of quality education and its total impact on society requires innovative ways to provide opportunities for students and close the achievement gap. The expansion of standardized testing has produced the opposite effect. In the student population that I serve, many families that have the ability have hired private tutors to work on test taking strategies. This not only skews the data pertaining to the actual knowledge and skills of a student, but also favors the students that have the ability to seek supplemental resources. Moreover, the limited focus of the tests discourages further development in a variety of areas, such as the arts, music, technology, business, and many others.

The issue of mental health of adolescents continues to grow exponentially in a multitude of ways caused by a wide range of stimuli. The current trade off on students' mental health in relation to positive educational outcomes does not support continuing on this path. A significant number of students have not developed to the point of managing the high stakes situation of the current testing procedures, have experienced a trauma that can interfere with their performance, or are experiencing an infinite amount of other variables. I have personally witnessed a student vomiting during a standardized test as a result of a panic or anxiety induced situation two times in my career.

The discrepancy in my professional development as an educator and the policies we implement in reality continues to be something that I struggle with regularly. In preparation for this testimony, I informally surveyed my students and their families to gather data that would give me perspective beyond my own. Although there were a variety of responses, the one constant was that our current system of testing is not bringing any positive outcomes to our school or community. Furthermore, the testing data that is linked to my professional evaluations has produced erratic results over a period of many years and has given no valuable insight or tools for growth. I appreciate your time and consideration towards finding ways to improve these policies and procedures and welcome any further dialogue.

Rob Schofield
Social Studies Teacher
Avon Lake High School
440-865-4812
rob.a.schofield@gmail.com