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**Collaborative Leaders,
Powerful Partnerships**

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AASL News

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measuring up

Testing, testing, 1, 2, 3, 4 . . . 5, 6, 7, 8 . . . 9, 10, 11, 12 . . .

Carol Gordon
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"Measuring Up" looks at assessment and evaluation—the strategic process of collecting, analyzing, reporting, and reflecting on data about programs and learners for continuous improvement.

How are standardized tests inhibiting real learning and what does that have to do with your instructional practice? Take a test and find out!

1. Standardized tests promote learning in all of the following ways except:

- they promote the idea that learning means trial and error and that there may be more than one answer to a question.
- they encourage attention to facts and concrete knowledge.
- they provide summative assessments that compare one learner's achievement to other learners (i.e., are norm-referenced.)
- they provide grades or ratings that often conform to the bell curve or expected distribution of grades.

Answer: a. Preparation for tests usually entails drilling and memorization for the right answer, rather than promoting the idea that there is learning value in making mistakes. Since standardized tests are summative assessments, students do not have an opportunity to revise and learn from the test.

2. Standardized tests:

- equate test scores with quality education.
- provide information to help parents choose schools.
- quantify the effect of tax dollars spent on public education.
- all of the above.

Answer: d. The use of standardized tests to evaluate schools is an invalid application of results that neglects to take into account inequities in funding, special challenges of urban schools, and sociological factors.

Another inappropriate use of test scores is the application of results to all points of analysis in education, such as learner, classroom, and school, which raises concerns about validity. Scores on norm-referenced tests, reported as percentiles, do not report how well students are progressing with respect to their own learning as a baseline, but how well they are progressing compared with everyone else. The general public, politicians, and the media are biased toward the quantifiable, which offers a succinct interpretation of test score data, rather than substantive information about the progress of schools.

3. An overemphasis on student test scores:

- diverts educators from real educational goals.
- uses a one-time assessment to represent an estimate of students' understanding of tested material at a particular point in time.
- results in the use of a single test as a basis for making critical decisions about student progress.
- all of the above.

Answer: d. Test results place an overemphasis on scores instead of on a student's ability to do complex thinking. The National Education Association, American Educational Research Association, American Psychological Association, National Research Council, American Federation of Teachers, and even test publishers have criticized the use of a single test as a sole factor in drawing conclusions from results.

Carol Gordon is Head of the Educational Resources Library at Boston (Mass.) University.

4. Test-driven educational reform has all of the following effects except:

- a. it hurts special needs, low-income, and minority students.
- b. it penalizes students with poor language skills.
- c. it promotes rote memorization and behavioral teaching.
- d. it objectively measures how much each child has learned (i.e., are criterion-referenced.).

Answer: d. Because standardized tests are constructed for students who are performing near their grade level, those substantially below that reading level cannot read the material on the test. Hence test scores for children with poor language and reading skills can be based on a very small sample of their abilities.

5. The effect of standardized tests on curriculum include all of the following except:

- a. schools use test results to revise the curriculum.
- b. schools use the test as the curriculum.

- c. the curriculum is truncated, dumbed-down, or superficially covered.
- d. expands the curriculum beyond content knowledge to include problem solving and development of students' unique abilities and talents.

Answer: d. Studies show that heavy emphasis on standardized tests reduces the quality and quantity of what is taught in schools. Anecdotal reports and case studies demonstrate that curriculum is narrowed to meet test specifications. Some principals demand teachers use commercial test preparation materials in lieu of the regular curriculum.

6. Standardized testing affects the school library media instructional program in all of the following ways except:

- a. it motivates teachers to use resource-based learning and projects to promote information literacy as well as mastery of academic content.
- b. it situates formative assessment in the classroom and library so that feedback from the assessment can be used in revision of student work and improved learning.

- c. it increases accountability in that teachers and librarians learn from the test results and adjust their teaching in a timely way to improve student achievement.
- d. none of the above.

Answer: d. While standardized tests put the focus on student performance, it is a summative, rather than formative, assessment that provides no feedback to learners or teachers for purposes of revision and improved learning. Standardized testing is one-shot testing, rather than longitudinal assessment that takes place over time.

What are the strengths of resource-based teaching that challenges learners to search and evaluate information, solve problems, and be creative? Answer: See 1a, 6a, 6b, 6c.

How can school library media programs survive in a test-driven teaching and learning environment? Answer: There are many. They are the school library media specialists who know the research, model best practice, and use evidence from their teaching that shows they make a difference in student achievement. ●