



Standardized tests exacerbate educational problems

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“Warren County Public Schools continues to see significant gaps in test scores for students who are African-American, Hispanic, English learners, disabled and those who qualify for free and reduced lunch,” Aaron Mudd noted in Sunday’s Daily News.

It’s been 17 years since No Child Left Behind was enacted. Unfortunately, the consequences of this monumental and well-intentioned legislation, with its unprecedented focus on “teaching to the test,” have been an unmitigated disaster for everyone involved.

Federally mandated testing in public schools, which is seen as a way to hold both students and teachers more accountable for the learning process, costs around \$700 million a year. Yet the idea that standardized tests give an objective, impartial and accurate assessment of how well a student has achieved mandated learning objectives remains highly suspect.

In far too many schools across the nation, valuable instructional time and scarce resources are devoted to preparing students to take standardized tests intended to show mastery of material that is inherently impeded by the pedagogical process itself.

Moreover, those most adversely affected by this unparalleled emphasis on the power of standardized testing to solve our educational, social, cultural and economic problems have been those from underrepresented populations and less affluent families.

The core problem in our education system is grades, not standardized tests. If the integrity of the grading system could be restored; i.e., if it could be re-established that a student’s grade-point average was truly indicative of his or her command of the material represented by that average, then the need for standardized tests to demonstrate either ability or potential would essentially evaporate.

The only way to effectively deal with this situation is to take standardized tests out of the equation, thus forcing educational institutions at all levels to deal with the root cause, not the symptom.

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