

Are Standardized Tests A Necessary or Unnecessary Evil?

Spring is on its way – or so says the Groundhog – and with it, the annual battery of school tests and assessments.

If recent years are any indication, this testing barrage will likely be met with reports of stressed students, frustrated teachers, and angry parents who decide to have their child “opt out” of standardized tests.

In order to discourage the escalation of the opt out movement, the Department of Education recently threatened to withdraw federal funding from schools who fail to have 95% of their students take annual exams. According to the [Washington Post](#), the opt out movement “stemmed from the Obama administration’s push to use standardized test scores to evaluate students and teachers in unprecedented ways, using methods that assessment experts say are not valid for that purpose.”

It’s an emotionally charged issue, but the question needs to be asked: should we have standardized tests?

In 1894, before the days of standardized tests, Dr. Mandell Creighton pondered a [similar question](#) about exams in general. He came away recognizing that exams in general have both their pros and cons:

“Without examinations there would be a tendency to idleness and laxity, teachers would not be kept up to the mark. The evil side of examinations is that, while they are simply meant to be tests, teachers will insist upon regarding them as standards. To get a class through an examination is too often regarded as the sole aim and object of teaching, but the real object should be so to train and educate the

children as to develop their intellect generally. Worse still, when the teachers take the examination as a standard, they will also insist upon trying to take short cuts towards the desired end. They cause certain facts and certain answers to be committed to memory, and in this way, instead of developing the intelligence of the children, they strive to circumvent the inspector, treating him as if he were a foe instead of a friend. As the examination draws near, they allot to themselves the time necessary to cram into the heads of their scholars the knowledge required in order to pass. ... True education consists in developing the intellect, not in committing to memory before an examination pages of information often profoundly dry and generally inaccurate."

As we approach the "opt out" season, it seems worthwhile to reflect upon Dr. Creighton's words. Standardized tests—like all tests—certainly have their drawbacks, but do you think they are still an important tool of evaluation in education today?