

July 28, 2017  
School Board of Miami-Dade County  
1450 N.E 2nd Avenue  
Miami, FL 33132

Dear School Board of Miami-Dade County,

I am writing because, like you, I want to see the students in our schools succeed. I have seen first hand the impact that Standardized testing can have on a student's academic success. Many believe testing is possibly the best thing that has happened in schools these past few years, but on the contrary, it has caused more anxiety in the students than helping them. There are many journal articles and research that talk about how standardized testing brings out the worst in students and teachers, which includes:

1. Pressure impact on students.
2. Teachers teaching to the test, removing all sorts of creativity in the classrooms.
3. Cheating and testing Anxiety giving an inaccurate measurement of students improvement, which is the purpose of testing.

I understand the Board meets once a month on Wednesdays. Therefore, I hereby request that as the district moves forward with the planning of this school years testing schedule, they will consider such alternatives as: performance-based assessments, surveys, student portfolios, and running records.

I have attached to this letter more information regarding the issue and a solution. I urge you to help end this madness by endorsing a resolution, and I am available to assist in making any decisions. Thank you for your time, service, and consideration.

Sincerely,



### The Problem:

We all agree that the main goal of a school is to prepare children to succeed, and provide them with the best education possible. However, is standardized testing the best and most efficient way to achieve this goal? There is much evidence that points to the contrary, reflecting that education has changed for the worst as standardized tests take over the curriculum. Allow me to illustrate some of the problems that stem from standardized testing...

Primarily, the point of standardized testing is to assess student progress... correct? However, have you considered those students who do not care, “Christmas tree” the test, or even have testing anxiety? Students with testing anxiety alone tend to ‘blank out’ due to fear of scoring low or stress from having an allotted time to complete the test; resulting to being placed in a class where they do not belong. Standardized testing often tests whether or not the student is a good test taker, not the intelligence of the student. As mentioned in the article *Standardized Tests do not effectively measure student achievement* test scores “don’t provide much useful information for evaluating a student’s achievement or a teacher’s competency” (Harris). Compared to foreign students, American students only spend half the amount they spend in school, tutoring, and homework which is the main reason of our poor performance. If a student can see their progress throughout the year they will be motivated to continue and enhance their performance.

Achievement is all about participating in class discussions, course taking patterns, and teacher’s professional developmental patterns. The majority of tests given out today are timed in which Kohn mentions in his book, *The case against standardized testing: raising the scores, ruining the schools* that those type of tests “ indicate the ability to do things quickly and under pressure” meaning “ a premium is placed on speed as opposed to thoughtfulness or even thoroughness”

(Kohn). From my personal experience, if I am rushed doing something, it'll only be full of mistakes. Every student has a unique qualities that standardized testing does not accurately measure. Qualities such as...creativity, curiosity, enthusiasm, leadership, resourcefulness, critical thinking and much more. Instead, standardized testing measures isolated skills, specific acts and functions, the least interesting and least significant aspects of learning.

Another problem is that all of this pressure removes creativity from the classroom environment. Teachers are teaching to the test, adding pressure that if they do not pass they'll fall behind all because they will be held accountable for their failure. Kohn mentions that “ plenty of successful adults would fail the high school exit exam used in many states— and might not even do all that well on some of the tests given to fourth graders” showing that the curriculum has changed over the years. Most students, as well as many teachers and administrators, despise standardized testing, nonetheless they continue to support standardized testing. In view of the fact that the government will remove funding if they don't continue testing, so many schools are forced to mandate standardized testing. The pressure to increase scores alters the curriculum in order for the teachers to teach to the test. Without creativity in classrooms, children are discourage to even go to school. You may think this only happens in high school, which is a false assumption, but Ravitch mentions in *Renouncing the Common Core* that “ children starting in the third grade may spend more than 10 hours a year taking state tests and weeks preparing of them” (Ravitch p.8). In 2009, President Obama announced *Race to the Top*, a competition for a federal grant. This encouraged students to work hard for something they wanted, instead of something they are being forced into.

Instead of reducing class sizes, restoring the arts, and rebuilding schools, the effort is being put into creating unnecessary tests. Teaching to the test demoralized teachers causing shortages.

The production of these tests defund arts programs and are the reason why recreational courses which are good for the students, yet untestable are being shut down.

### Counter Argument:

Although this may be true, many also believe that standardized testing is effective. A teacher I interviewed mentioned that standardized testing is an “adequate way to gauge student norms,” which is why they are used for decisions about admission into college. Standardized testing is in fact used because the costs of tests are less than 0.1 percent of total spending on K-12 education, meaning it’s only about \$6 per student. Multiple people believe that tests offer information on how well they have mastered the material intended for learning. In fact Walberg mentions in the article *Standardized Tests Effectively Measure Student Achievement* that “when standardized tests are used appropriately, a great deal can be learned about how well schools function” (Walberg). Although, it is true that teachers can help students know how their objective performance compares to others. If the student does not take the test seriously or even “blank out”, what good does that do? Yes, when standardized tests are misused, teaching and learning may be defective; but when they are used appropriately, it allows educators to make conclusions about how much students are learning. Teachers can use the student’s tests results to respond directly to their individual needs, by giving help to those falling behind, or enriching learning for those who are advanced.

A comparative study by John Bishop of Cornell University found that “U.S students who anticipated having to pass a standardized test for high school graduation... are more likely to complete homework, talk with their parents about schoolwork, and watched less television than

peers who were not required to pass such exams” (Bishop). This is a clear example that students who stress from the pressure given from testing only cares about the tests. In spite of that, those activities encourage students to concentrate on meeting standards; also monitoring their own time and progress—skills that not only increase achievement, but also success in life. Teachers should take pride in seeing good results from the tests scores, because it shows that their teaching what is necessary. Many teachers may even receive bonuses if they receive a certain passing rate.

### Solution:

If standardized tests only “sample...a small fraction...as little as 5-10 percent, of all content and skills” (Walberg), then why continue? Why not look into other alternatives to see what truly helps? A few alternatives are: performance-based assessments, surveys, student portfolios, and running records. For example, performance and portfolio-based assessments document what children know and can do based on activities they engage in on a daily basis in the classrooms, whereas standardized test do not. Meisels mentions in *Performance Assessment* that they allow an “individualized approach to assessing abilities and performance” by evaluating a child’s progress from ongoing classroom interactions. Such assessments should obtain components such as developmental checklist, portfolios ,and a summary report.

Surveys can help get an idea of what’s best to help students learn and retain the information. Teachers can use the surveys to see what they want to learn, how they want to learn it, and why they believe it’s the best way to do it. Nowadays many students, who are not involved in the classrooms, prefer not to go to school, resulting in a decline in school attendance. Yet, if the

environment is more engaging, they'll want to come to school, which will increase school attendance. This is where a survey will be very helpful because it will help us determine what the students like and don't like. We have to ask and consider their opinion.

Our poor achievement progress shows that improvement in teaching and learning is needed. So why not try something new. Education is supposed to be fun, and worth going back every day, not dreadful. Unless you would like to see drop out rates, lower scores and teacher shortages increase, the School Board needs to make a change for the better. Try out a new alternative for a few years, and see what the results are.

### Works Cited

Kohn, Alfie. *The case against standardized testing: raising the scores, ruining the schools.*

Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000. Print.

<http://teacherrenewal.wiki.westga.edu/file/view/Testing,+Testing,+Testing.pdf>

Ravitch, Diane. "Renouncing the Common Core." *New York Times*, 24 July 2016, p. 8(L).

*Opposing Viewpoints in Context*,

ezproxy.fiu.edu/login?url=http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/A459098796/OVIC?u=miam11506&xid=124898fc. Accessed 15 July 2017.

Harris, Phillip, et al. "Standardized Tests Do Not Effectively Measure Student Achievement."

*Standardized Testing*, edited by Dedria Bryfonski, Greenhaven Press, 2012. At Issue.

*Opposing Viewpoints in Context*,

ezproxy.fiu.edu/login?url=http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/EJ3010478218/OVIC?u=miam11506&xid=537648c4. Accessed 15 July 2017. Originally published as "Chapter 3: The Tests Don't Measure Achievement Adequately," *The Myths of Standardized Tests: Why They Don't Tell You What You Think They Do*, 2011, pp. 33-45.

Walberg, Herbert J. "Standardized Tests Effectively Measure Student Achievement."

*Standardized Testing*, edited by Dedria Bryfonski, Greenhaven Press, 2012. At Issue.

*Opposing Viewpoints in Context*,

ezproxy.fiu.edu/login?url=http://link.galegroup.com/apps/doc/EJ3010478217/OVIC?u=miam11506&xid=446a685. Accessed 15 July 2017. Originally published as "Stop the War Against Standardized Tests," *Defining Ideas: A Hoover Institution Journal*, 20 May 2011.

Anonymous. "What are you're thoughts on standardized testing?" Telephone interview. 30 June 2017.

Meisels, Samuel J. Ed.D. "Perfomance Assessment". Scholastic Inc. 2017.

<http://teacher.scholastic.com/professional/assessment/perfassess.htm>. Accessed 27 July 2017. Web.

Kamenetz, Anya. "What Schools Could Use Instead Of Standardized Tests." NPR. NPR, 06 Jan. 2015. Web. 30 June 2017.