Standardized Testing

Standardized testing in high schools located in urban communities has been one of the most discussed topics in the educational field. There has been an ongoing debate on whether standardized testing is a good method in determining if the students are proficient or failing and if it is helpful on pinpointing where the student needs improvement. The other side to the debate is whether if standardized testing is a negative issue, since it increases stress on the student. Also it labels the student with low standardized testing scores as failing without considering the issues they have outside of school that increases stress due to their socioeconomic status.

Students in low economic status background struggle in high school compared to higher income students. Students living in poverty are unable to prioritize school over other responsibilities because they have to deal with issues such as child care, home maintenance, chores, and sometimes daily survival (Cunningham, 2002). Students living in lower income statuses usually do not have time and support for homework from their family and are less likely to be in other co-curricular activities. It is because education is not highly prioritize in low socioeconomic house hold students since there are other issues more important than education (such as daily survival, working to meet financial needs…etc). Conversely, students of high-income homes receive support from their family and it is believe that education is essential to them compare to lower economic

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students. “This creates additional obstacles for educating lower-income students” (Cunningham, 2002). It is assumed that schools who serve students with parents that are more affluent will receive a better education, higher success in school, attend a better financed school because of the community based tax, and receive greater stimulation in the home and community and have more opportunities for academic achievement.

Students who attend schools which are in less affluent neighborhoods struggle more due to fewer opportunities, a great number of at-risk students, larger class sizes and family circumstances. All these negative circumstances will influence performance on a standardized test. They are discouraging students when standardized test define students in poverty schools as “proficient” or “failing” without considering their socioeconomic status which plays a role in the success of their test scores. In an article The Impact of Mandated Standardized Testing on Minority Students by Lomax, it is stated that “As some of these observers claim, because standardized tests reflect the majority culture, minority students performance on them may not yield a fair representation of what these students really know and can do, given their economic and educational disadvantages.”

In result causes unfairness for low socioeconomic student in seeking opportunity for higher education. It is unfair because standardize testing labels them into a specific category (proficient or failing) without consider their background which enables them to lose motivation in school. Ultimately it gives the high school students a higher chance of dropping out. Standardized testing can be a negative issue when the results of the test do

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2 William G Cunningham & Tiffany D Sanzo.Is high-stakes testing harming lower socioeconomic status schools, 65.
3 Richard G. Lomax, Mary Maxwell West, Maryellen C. Harmon, Katherine A.Viator and George F. The Impact of Mandated Standardized Testing on Minority Students (Spring, 1995), 172
not factor in the background of the students.

Students in lower economic status schools spend a greater amount of time preparing for the test compared to other students. They are given more attention in preparing for the standardize test. This is supposed to allow them to be more prepared on what is expected on the test. In the article The Effects of Standardized testing on Teaching and Schools by Herman, it claimed that “Study findings that the schools with more low-SES students give more attention to testing and more time to test preparation” (Herman, 2005). This is beneficial to students that are from low socioeconomic schools because it allows them to be better prepared for the test. There is a debate on whether this is a good idea or not, due to the issues of increase stress on the students.

Students who are in a lower economic status have more stress. Some of the stress they may have are not school related. Therefore when two types of stress are involved (outside of school stress and classroom achievement stress) students are more likely to give up on school. The issue of how standardized testing effects the stress levels of students in urban schools is still being debated. According to the article, On Standardized Testing by Solley, he stated that “Children are now under increased pressure to perform on demand, memorize mundane facts and figure, and sit for a long periods of time while listening to the teacher and/or filling in circles on a worksheet.” The purpose of the standardized testing was hoping to motivate students into learning because it is associated with rewards. When pressure increases, students can begin to fail due to the increase of stress. Also, their motivation begins to decrease over time. Solley stated that “The use of

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5 Solley, B. On Standardized Testing: An ACEI Position Paper. Childhood Education,
standardized testing, along with the resultant system of extrinsic rewards and consequences, has had a negative effect of students’ motivation. As a result, students’ fear of failure has lessened their motivation to learn” (Solley, 2007). According to the article Is High-Stakes Testing Harming Lower Socioeconomic Status Schools by William Cunningham, it stated that “Competency tests that are intended to motivate schools to raise the bar and assist students to achieve higher expectations are in fact highlighting the inequalities, creating greater disparity among schools, and fueling discouragement among students in schools with low SES.” When students believe something is too difficult to achieve, their motivation will drop. Solley claimed that “A study conducted by Nichols, Glass, and Berliner found that highstakes testing pressure is negatively associated with the likelihood that 8th- and 9th-graders will eventually enter and complete 12th grade” (Solley, 2007). When students lose motivation they are more likely to not try in school. The increase of stress level is contributed to their motivation.

Standardized testing may have its negatives issues; however, there are some positive outcomes from standardized testing. Some will debate that standardized testing is a useful tool in measuring a student’s progress. It can then allow schools and teachers to focus on which areas of a subject to improve more on which leads can then lead to improving students learning. In the article, The Effects of Standardized testing on Teaching and Schools by Herman and Golan, it stated that “To those who agree that the tests represent meaningful learning and instruction, results suggest that standardized testing is a productive policy tool. It focuses schools on important standards and

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similarly encourages educators to focus their instructional programs and time on valued skills” (Herman, 2005). If teachers and instructors can pinpoint where a student or class needs improvement, they can rearrange their curriculum to better fit the students. In urban high school settings, this can be beneficial because it allows the schools to focus on where those students are most in need of improvement in their learning. Students in lower socioeconomic status are more likely to need support in their learning from the teachers since they are less likely to get support elsewhere. If standardized testing is an important tool in helping to develop an improvement in education for students, then it will allow lower socioeconomic students to be better prepared for higher education.

Standardized testing can be bad or good depending on how one views the test as whether it is a useful tool in measuring the capability of student or not. In the end, there will always be disagreements and agreements about whether the usage of standardized testing is positive or negative. Those that believe that standardized testing is a positive issue will believe that it represents a meaningful tool. It will help produce results in which the teachers can use to further help students. Others will say that standardized testing is a negative issues and that it creates too much pressure for the students who are low socioeconomic status background. It also creates inequality when it comes to labeling low socioeconomic status students as “proficient” or “failing” without taking into consideration of the other issues that plays a part in their life.

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Reference


