

Standardized Tests

(aka assessments, measures, sometimes included as “indicators”)

SUMMARY of *inappropriate* uses of **standardized “achievement” tests** include:

- 1) **Evaluating schools** because “both socioeconomic status and inherited academic aptitudes [individual abilities] reflect what children bring to school, not what they learn there,”
- 2) **Evaluating teachers** because of “shifting ability-levels of a teacher’s students” from year to year,
- 3) **Promoting or grading students** because these tests are only a *limited “sample” of knowledge and skills* not an “end of course test,” and
- 4) **Making classroom instructional decisions** because of the limited scope of the tests. If this limited information is used to shape instruction, it may result in the instruction being “off-target.”

<http://www.sagepub.com/eis2study/articles/Popham.pdf>

SUMMARY of **Ten “Must Know” Facts About Educational Testing**

<http://www.pta.org/programs/content.cfm?ItemNumber=1724>

Fact 1. Educational tests are **much less accurate than most parents believe**. A child's test performance on a given day can be greatly influenced by both physical factors and emotional factors. In addition, the tests themselves only sample a child's skills and knowledge, and this sampling is often far from sufficient.

Fact 2. Educational tests **allow teachers to make inferences** about a student's unseen skills or knowledge, but these inferences **may or may not be valid**.

Fact 3. High-stakes tests, depending on the particular way they are constructed, can have a decisively positive or negative effect on a child's education. When students' performances on a test have important consequences for students (such as grade-to-grade promotion *or diploma-denial*) or for those students' teachers (such as test-based *evaluations of a school staff's effectiveness*), the test is referred to as a “high-stakes test.”

Fact 4. Achievement tests are intended to measure significant skills or bodies of knowledge that children should learn. A standardized **aptitude test** (like SAT and ACT), on the other hand, is intended to predict a student's subsequent academic performance.

Fact 5. Traditionally constructed **standardized achievement tests** can provide parents and teachers with useful information about a **student's *relative* performance** levels (compared to other students).

Because a student's relative standing typically doesn't change rapidly, traditionally constructed standardized achievement tests need not be administered yearly to supply parents with this kind of comparative information.

Fact 6. Traditionally constructed standardized achievement tests—designed chiefly to compare a student's test score with other students' scores—**should not be used to evaluate school quality.**

Fact 7. Even though only about 25 percent of a student's success in college is related to the student's score on **aptitude tests** such as the ACT and SAT, **parents should (1)** still help their children prepare for those tests, but **(2)** avoid conveying a negative impression to a child whose test scores are not particularly high. There are many factors far more influential than aptitude-test scores in predicting a student's college performance.

Fact 8. Performance tests [verses **Fact #4 “Achievement” tests**], although both difficult and costly to score, often yield the most valid inferences about a student's mastery of many significant skills. When students generate an original response to an essay-writing task, we call this a performance test. Performance tests require students to construct their responses "from scratch" rather than merely selecting their responses from the already-presented options in multiple-choice items.

Fact 9. Although an individual student's attitudes or interests are almost impossible to measure accurately, **assessing such affective outcomes on a group-basis can provide accurate and powerful evidence of the quality of a school's instructional program.**

If parents set out **to judge a school's quality**, they should look at lots more than mere test scores. For instance, are students genuinely excited about what they are learning? Do students really look forward to going to school? Are students gaining increased confidence in their ability to use the things they are learning in school? These are important questions, and their answers all revolve around the kind of affect being promoted in a school.

The use of self-report affective inventories—questionnaires completed anonymously by students—can supply educators and parents with important insights about students' affect. When students' anonymous responses to such inventories are pooled to be analyzed, the responses yield a reasonably accurate picture of the affective status of a student group. Thus, it is possible to obtain, at little cost, satisfactory estimates of group-affect dealing with such variables as students' (1) perceived safety when at school, (2) interest in various school subjects, (3) attitudes toward learning, and (4) confidence in carrying out significant academic skills.

Fact 10. Because educational tests (both teacher-made classroom tests and commercially developed standardized tests) vary in their quality, **it should not be assumed that every educational test is a good one.** Today's standardized tests, even those created by reputable test-development firms, will sometimes fail to be at the high quality level that those firms would prefer.

SOURCE: W. James Popham, Ed.D. is author of Testing! Testing! What Every Parent Should Know About School Tests (Needham Heights, MA: Allyn and Bacon, 2000). He is professor emeritus at the University of California, Los Angeles