

PURE FACT SHEET Standardized Tests

What are some of the problems with standardized tests?

- They are designed to rank and sort children. Many use a scoring system in which half of all children in the nation always score below average.
- There is a well-known **achievement gap** between the test scores of white and Asian students and African-American and Latino students. Rather than help all children achieve, this overemphasis on standardized tests will label more minority children and their schools as failures.
- **Standardized tests can be biased.** A study from 2002 showed that sample questions which were answered correctly by more African-American students were not chosen for use in the tests; this was done so that test results – showing African-Americans scoring lower than whites – would be “consistent” from year to year. (See PURE FactSheet, “Bias in Standardized Tests”)



Tests designed to rank and sort students

- **Test errors** continue to create chaos for families and schools. In Minnesota in 2001, a student was denied a high school diploma because of her scores on a standardized graduation exam. Her father had a lengthy fight with the state to see the test questions and answers. When he finally saw the test, he discovered that the answer key used to score the tests had some questions mixed up. In fact, his daughter should have passed the test. Since it took so long for the truth to come out, his daughter and many other students missed their chance to enroll in college and receive scholarships that year.

A recent report found **50 major testing mistakes in 20 states**. The fact that most of these tests are kept secret from the community makes it likely that even more mistakes happen – we just never find out about them.

- New York parents created a web site, www.browniethecow.org, to expose the poor quality of test questions on the state Regents exam.
- Overemphasis on standardized tests can lead to a **dumbed-down curriculum**. These tests are made up mostly of multiple choice and short answer questions which can't and don't measure higher-order thinking, creativity, speaking or artistic skills, or many other important areas our children need to learn about. Unfortunately, areas which are not tested are becoming less and less a part of school, especially under the pressure of NCLB.

A recent report found 50 major testing mistakes in 20 states.