

Dear Members of the Senate Committee on Education,

I urge you to act in favor of SB 596. I stand in support of the bill that would prohibit standardized testing for students in pre-kindergarten through grade two. It is long overdue that we recognize the biased and flawed nature of standardized tests and say goodbye to the racist relic that they are.

Standardized testing actually increases inequities and reinforces hierarchies for several reasons. First and foremost, standardized testing has racist roots in the eugenics movements of the early 1900's in this country. These tests have long been used to try to justify inequities by falsely racializing intelligence and equating it with white male superiority.

Next, standardized testing contributes to higher levels of anxiety and stress which compounds poor health outcomes for communities of color. This is due to stereotype threat. Students worry that they will perform poorly based on FALSE stereotypes and then their stress and anxiety contribute to lower performance. This was brought home to me recently in a discussion with a student who was a straight A student yet routinely performed poorly on standardized tests. They described a gnawing anxiety felt during the time leading up to testing and during testing itself.

Moreover, we have not yet been able to create a test free of racial, cultural or socioeconomic bias in its content and questions. Most often tests questions still favor norms valued and dictated by the white upper middle class. For these reasons, standardized testing actually widens the achievement gap and acts as yet another barrier to equity and access to communities of color.

In addition to all of these factors, standardized tests unnecessarily restrict teachers' ability to effectively do their job. They must limit their curriculum to "teach to the test". This reduces creativity and opportunities for growth in our students by not recognizing and reinforcing other modalities. We can and should switch to more appropriate equitable assessments that are provided by teachers themselves. This will not restrict their ability to administer relevant and applicable assessments within their classrooms and would provide more accurate results.

Sincerely,

Mica Contreras
Justice and Equity Program Organizer
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