

The failure of the US educational system:

A deep analysis of the modern US educational model
and how it has failed upon nearly all fronts

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Abstract: The following paper is a woven collection of 3 papers that have been written over the course of the Fall 2022 semester. The goal of these papers were to analyze historical narratives pertaining to a topic of our choosing. I knew I wanted to research education as it was, and still is, something that I am very passionate about. My personal goal for this paper is to provide the reader with enough information and anecdotal evidence to form an elementary opinion regarding multiple educational topics; as well as, encourage further research into the topics that fascinate the reader.

Education is much more than sitting down in a classroom and learning. Schools require funding to hire teachers, those teachers have to handle what material is being taught, education ‘has to’ be evenly distributed amongst students of different social classes, ETC. There is a lot that goes into providing an education to students, and each level of that system must be examined to determine if an educational model is truly working. I have split the current US educational model into three levels, that will each be thoroughly analyzed with the goal of determining the effectiveness of the model. It is important to look at the history of how we reached our current model of education, and that is why the first level is looking at the educational history of minority groups. I chose specifically minority groups due to the fact that their educational history has repeatedly shown the flaws of many systems, and should reveal the problems leading up to our current system. The second level is the education itself, and what is being taught. For this I analyzed the repeated attempts of implementing religious ideology in education and the push back against such actions. The last level is a look at the government's role in education, specifically looking at their use of standardized testing and common curricula. With these three levels, major topics such as political, social, and economic effects of the system are

discussed. Even with this model, some topics were not analyzed and I believe it to be important to lay those topics out. The first level only looks at 3 minority groups, while some analysis looks at their overlap; it is mostly looking at each group individually instead of the bigger picture. The second level exclusively discusses the idea of christian ideology within education, there are many other topics outside of this that are challenged in education such as the ongoing struggle of banned books. The third level focuses on a single aspect of the government's role in education, out of many. With the idea that this paper is simply giving a start to one's further research into these topics, I find it reasonable to exclude the many variables within here. If one was to write a paper about all of these topics, it would be incomprehensibly long. For the sake of comprehensibility, I chose the topics I believed to be most important within each level.

Level 1: History of education, and the path that led to our current model of education

Clarkson University¹ has a memorial on campus that represents the struggles and endeavors of Native Americans, African Americans, and Hispanics. This memorial was used as a starting point for analyzing the first level of education. These vastly different groups all experienced struggles when it came to generational poverty² provoked by a lacking education system. It is important to note that all of these groups are vastly unique in their experiences, although some overlap occurs they should be analyzed individually. The US has a steady history of undermining educational ethics at the expense of current and future minority generations.

Boarding schools are one of the most well known forms of assimilation conducted in the US's history. These schools would take Native American children from their homes, and bring

¹ The university I studied at during the time of writing this paper

² The idea of future generations not being provided the tools for success due to their parents not being provided those tools

them to less-than-ideal quality schools that would eliminate their native culture. These boarding schools assimilated Native American children into ‘sophisticated’ and ‘civilized’ citizens. Most schools utilized a motto similar to ‘Kill the Indian, save the man’. This phrase came from Richard Pratt, who founded the first Indian boarding school in 1879. He believed that “Native people would not succeed unless their traditions, habits, and beliefs were eradicated”. Not only was this a cultural genocide, but a physical genocide as well; 500 deaths have been attributed to these boarding schools as of 2014, with the number expected to rise as investigations continue³. The unfortunate success of Pratt's school inspired around 425 boarding schools to be built in the following 20 years. Because most Indians were already kept secluded on reservations, it was easy for the government to locate Native children they wanted to enter the boarding schools. The communities and parents of these children fought against their child being taken away to get their culture stripped from them. Parents who resisted were met with prison time and their children being forcibly taken to boarding schools. The punishment became more severe with the Act of March 3, 1893; which authorized the Secretary of the Interior to “withhold rations, including those guaranteed by treaties, to Indian families whose children did not attend schools”⁴. This means that a parents decision comes down to two choices: give in to the government's attempt to strip their children's culture away from them, or risk prison time and limited food rations for your entire community. The impossible ultimatum was faced by nearly all tribes on reservations over the years, and consequently many nations succumbed to the Act of March 3 and either starved or had to say goodbye to their children.. Nearly 100,000 native American kids were taken to these boarding schools, and subsequently nearly 100,000 children's lives stripped away from them.

³ Equal Justice Initiative, “*Cultural Genocide and Native American Children*”, 9/21/2022

⁴ Bryan Newland, “*Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative: Investigative Report*”, 9/21/2022

African Americans have the most well-known educational history. They were not taught anything as slaves, had segregated schools that were not funded properly, and lacked generational wealth to further their education. But the landmark supreme court case Brown vs. Board of Education solved all these issues and there was no more segregation in schools. Well this last statement is false, demonstrably so. While legally binding segregated schools may not exist anymore, they are still very much segregated. Black children are 5 times as likely as white children to attend school with greater minority populations⁵. This means that these children are going to ‘segregated schools’ as this imbalance correlates with imbalances in minority vs. white communities. To further this point, black children are more than 2 times as likely to attend high-poverty schools than white children. This is what starts the endless cycle of generational wealth for black communities. They started off their education in poor communities, could not further their education because of this, and were forced to put their children into those same high-poverty schools. These schools were also much larger in size to accommodate for the limited budgets. They required to have little teachers, meaning teachers were teaching 20+ students at a time⁶. This led to less individual time with students, which allows for more time for individual questions and direct help instead of lecture-style teaching. These communities have suffered through years of a lack of generational wealth which forced them into high-poverty schools; in which, they received a poor education to further this cycle.

Hispanics were a mix of the two other groups above when it came to their educational history in the United States. They faced the numerous issues of segregated schools where they received a lower level of education due to limited resources and limited opportunities. They were

⁵ Emma Garcia, “Schools are still segregated, and black children are paying a price”, 9/21/2022

⁶ University of Richmond, “The African American Struggle through the U.S. Educational System”, 9/21/2022

put into these schools because they were viewed as having “no proper health habits and need training in morals, manners, and cleanliness”⁷. A school board member in El Modena said in a 1945 meeting, “If we educate the Mexicans better, who would pick our crops?”⁸. It was clear there was no intention to actually teach Hispanic children, but instead to give them the false hope of education while just keeping them in the same situation as their ancestors. This problem extended into the 1980s when the first Latino Secretary of Education blamed Latino immigrant parents for their children's poor education, and claimed that their children's education was not being prioritized by the parents⁹. The Latino high school dropout rate at this time was 40%, and both the Secretary of Education and then President George W. Bush defended the notion it was the parents fault for this. The little education they got was very negligible because the school administrations prioritized teaching English to Hispanic children. This meant that you could have had a highly gifted student in math or science who is being held back because of forced English education. This put nearly all Hispanic school children behind in their education, and contributed to the endless cycle of generational poverty.

It is clear that all three of these minority groups have been disadvantaged for years now, and generations have suffered. Many schools have memorials to represent these groups and shed light on what they had to go through and what they still go through now. Clarkson University planted a tree in their honor, with an engraved memorial. It is on the far end of Cheel lawn near the greenhouses. Few people walk this path because there is nothing over there, and if you

⁷ Claudio Sanchez, “*Tougher Times For Lationo Student? History Says They’ve Never Had It Easy*”, 9/22/2022

⁸ Claudio Sanchez, “*Tougher Times For Lationo Student? History Says They’ve Never Had It Easy*”, 9/22/2022

⁹ George Ramos, “*Bush Expresses His Views on Latino Issues*”, 9/22/2022

needed to walk that path you would simply cut through Cheel lawn. My teacher who informed me of this tree said “good luck finding it”, and it took me around 25 minutes walking around campus to find the tree. The engraving reads:

The roots of this tree represent the people and experience that anchor us in our efforts;

The trunk is the strength and support we need in our endeavors;

The branches are the sources of inspiration that propel us to higher levels of achievement;

The needles represent the hopes for the future for all of us.

I believe that this engraving does not work as well as the university had hoped it would. This is because it was placed in a secluded part of campus that was hard to find, and few have reason to pass it. I do believe though, that the engraving itself works very well. It gives notice to the struggles these groups went through, gives praise to those who were able to escape the cycle and succeed, and shows appreciation for their efforts. I believe there are two changes that should be made to this memorial site. It should be put somewhere that people have a reason to go to. This way more people are going to be noticing it, therefore shedding more light on the struggles these groups endeavored. I also think the engraving should be split into three separate memorials. Looking at even one of these groups such as Native Americans, the generalization of ‘native american’ is so broad that it is difficult to comment on. So grouping all three of these groups' experiences into one does not do as much justice as it could. There should be three separate

memorials that all represent the individual group's experiences, as these experiences would define generations to come as well as the modeling of those groups' education.

Level 2: Analysis of the education being taught, and the push backs of change

Education has a history of being taught by religious groups. Indian boarding schools were taught by nuns, and the first schools were nearly exclusively teaching religion. But as society does what it always does, changes, it grew separated from the church. Religious figures were not a fan of this change, and tried to fight back against it. At the back end of the second great awakening, Christian leaders faced what they called the Darwinian crisis¹⁰. A battle between the Scientific research supported the idea that humans evolved to become what they are today, and the Christian idea of the Divine Creation of man. In what came to be known as the Scopes Monkey Trial, two leading figures of their respective groups went head to head to discredit the others ideologies.

The Scopes Monkey Trial featured politician William Jennings Bryan and attorney Clarence Darrow¹¹. Bryan was a revered opponent of evolutionary theory and can be attributed to creating the national controversy over teaching evolution in school¹². Darrow had initially declined the request to be involved in the trial until he heard that Bryan would be representing the prosecution¹³. The two leaders of their respective groups had previously clashed over this topic in both public and private scenarios. It was very clear from the start that this trial would be an attack upon the other sides beliefs, evident by attacks being made through the media to the

¹⁰ Robert William Fogel. *The Phases of the Four Great Awakenings*. 1993.

¹¹ History.com Editors ED. *Scopes Trial*. Sep 6, 2022.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

point that the ACLU attempted to remove Darrow from the trial¹⁴. From the publicity brought to the trial from two famous figures and the attention brought to Dayton, the trial saw a packed courthouse. Along with this, vendors set up shops outside the courthouse and around town to profit off of the publicity¹⁵. Most of the crowd mocked the defense and hung up posters reading “You Need God In Your Business” and similar phrases¹⁶. The presiding judge had to move the trial outside due to the sheer size of the crowd and had approved the trial to be broadcast on radio¹⁷, which only contributed to the festive atmosphere¹⁸. Before the trial even started, it was clear it was going to be extremely important for the country, as well as a complete mess.

For context on the different strategies used in the trial, the Butler Act must first be looked at. The first section of House Bill No. 185 paints the picture of the issue at play in this trial, *“That it shall be unlawful for any teacher in any of the Universities, Normals and all other public schools of the State which are supported in whole or in part by the public school funds of the State, to teach any theory that denies the story of the Divine Creation of man as taught in the Bible, and to teach instead that man has descended from a lower order of animals”*.¹⁹ House Bill No. 185, named the Butler Act, prevented any educators from teaching that humans came from any source other than the Divine Creation of man. After coercing with the ACLU, high school teacher John Thomas Scopes confessed to having taught evolution in his classes²⁰. Following a preliminary hearing where students were able to confirm this²¹ Scopes' case was put on trial for violating the Butler Act.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ James C. Foster. *Scopes Monkey Trial*. 2009.

¹⁷ This was the first trial to be broadcast by radio, and had reached as far as London and Hong Kong. Ibid.

¹⁸ Ibid.

¹⁹ [Wayback Machine](#) provided this quote from the Tennessee Bill.

²⁰ History.com Editors ED. *Scopes Trial*. Sep 6, 2022.

²¹ Ibid.

The defense's strategy was to prove the legitimacy of evolutionary theory, which was a goal of the ACLU and would prove that the Butler Act was unconstitutional. The judge swiftly destroyed their strategy by stating that all their evidence was inadmissible as it was Scopes on trial not the Butler Act.²² With the crowds of people outside supporting Bryan and his defense destroyed, Darrow thought of a new strategy to not win the trial; but, to attempt to put an end to the arguments against evolutionary theory. In front of all of his supporters, Bryan was put on the witness stand by Darrow. He was questioned in an attempt to discredit his interpretation of the bible, and in the process was forced to make ignorant and contradictory statements that disgraced his fundamentalist views.²³ Darrow proceeded to give his closing statement and asked the jury to return with a guilty verdict, which denied Bryan his own closing statement he had been preparing²⁴. It only took the jury eight minutes to determine a guilty verdict²⁵, but the reputational damage done to both Bryan and his beliefs were irreparable. The verdict was later overturned by the Tennessee supreme court on a technicality, but the constitutionality issues were not confronted until the U.S. Supreme Court case *Epperson v. Arkansas* determined that a law similar to the Butler Act had violated the first amendment²⁶.

This trial was vital for the shaping of the 20th century. After the trial, fundamentalist groups realized that their attempt to ensue a broad culture war was fruitless. They instead divided up and created subgroups that would attempt to create subcultures rather than the initial attempt at a larger cultural impact²⁷. As the evolving culture came to accept evolution as a scientifically

²² History.com Editors ED. *Scopes Monkey Trial Begins*. June 30, 2022.

²³ Ibid.

²⁴ Ibid.

²⁵ Ibid.

²⁶ James C. Foster. *Scopes Monkey Trial*. 2009.

²⁷ Alex Ward. *The Significance of the Scopes Monkey Trial*. July 21, 2020.

backed theory of human ancestry, the law came around to the idea as well. Multiple cases following the Scopes trial backed the idea to strike down legislation similar to the Butler Act: *Epperson v Arkansas* (1968), *Edwards v. Aguillard* (1987), *Kitzmiller v. Dover Area School District* (2005)²⁸. Even though nearly a third of teens today do not affiliate with any religion²⁹, it has not stopped attempts to re-involve religion with education. In recent times, there have been many attempts to stop the growing global acceptance of LGBTQ+ groups by preventing education on their history. There have been many laws within the past three years that have massive implications for the future of education, and nearly all directly harm the children.

In April 2022, Florida governor Rob DeSantis passed the popularly named “Dont Say Gay” law, which preventing educators mentioning anything regarding LGBTQ+ until after the third grade³⁰. After the thirds grade, the law ambiguously gives educators the power to teach about LGBTQ+, although parents were given the power to sue the school if they do not like the education their children receives³¹. This means that if a parent does not like that their children are learning about the horrific oppression of the LGBTQ+ community over the years, they can simply threaten a lawsuit and the school can prevent the teacher from teaching such topics. There have been similar laws enacted in Indiana, South Dakota, Alabama, Utah, and similarly aligned states that prevent students from using the bathroom that aligns with their gender identity³². Laws have forced masculine girls to be gender checked before being able to play sports, preventing trans-boys from using the boys locker room, punishing students for discussing their sexual orientation in class, mocking students for simply giving someone their pronouns³³. The common

²⁸ Wikipedia. *Creation and Evolution in public education in the United States*. September 29, 2022.

²⁹ Pew Research Center. *Religious Affiliation Among American Adolescents*. September 10, 2020.

³⁰ Amber Phillips. *Florida’s law limiting LGBTQ discussion in schools, explained*. April 22, 2022.

³¹ Ibid.

³² Anne Branigin. *10 anti-LGBTQ laws just went into effect. They all target schools*. July 8, 2022.

³³ Ibid.

notion among the legislators making these laws are that one day you can feel gay or want to identify as a different gender at a moments notice, they fail to look at the evidence of how the impact of not accepting someone effects them, and the evidence supporting the concepts of non-conforming children. Most non-conforming children understand they are not straight by the age of 10³⁴. Studies have also shown that it is a process children go through, one that can take many years before they fully understand their gender identity or sexual orientation³⁵. There is a culture war occurring between those who believe in the struggles of the LGBTQ+ community, and those whose goal is to sweep it under the rug and suppress their voices.

These two commentaries regarding the previous challenges of teaching evolution and current struggles of teaching about LGBTQ+ topics in schools are scarily similar. You can find popular figures from each side of the issue that battle on the front of their religious beliefs or lack of. One side that does so at the expense of the children, and the other who attempts to support the children. While one might think the myth of religious groups manipulating school curriculums was an issue of the 1900's, it's clear that this issue has only shifted in the demographic it is targeting. Just as the social fabric had to combat the attack on scientific study about evolution, it once again has to combat the attack on how a child feels.

Level 3: Government's role in education

Common curricula and standardized testing has been a staple in US education for well over a decade, with standardized testing spanning decades before that. These topics have a lot of controversy surrounding them, and with that it can be difficult to get a grasp upon the real

³⁴ Institute of Medicine. *The health of Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender people: Building a foundation for better understand*. 2011.

³⁵ Ibid.

success and failures of these systems. Even though these systems have been in place for a significant amount of time, they are riddled with flaws that harm both teachers and students.

It is important to understand the history behind standardized testing and common curricula. The road to our modern educational model is a rough one, and vital to understanding the flaws of that model. Prior to 1960, only two states recognized education as a constitutional right³⁶. After *Brown vs. Board of Education*, activists started to put their efforts into improving education in the states. The 70's to 90's held many court cases in many states that resulted in most states adding education as a constitutional right. A major case that influenced many states' legislation was *Rose vs. Council for Better Education in Kentucky*. The court defined 7 capabilities of an education system, capabilities that many states adopted. They can be summarized thus³⁷:

1. Develop communication skills so students can keep up in an ever evolving civilization.
2. Knowledge of economic, social, and political systems to enable informed decisions by students.
3. Understanding of government structure in order for students to understand issues in their community, state, and nation.
4. Develop students' abilities to understand their physical and mental well-being.
5. Sufficient grounding in the arts so students can understand and appreciate their cultural and historical heritage.
6. Sufficient training or preparation to succeed in higher education or vocational fields in order for students to intelligently choose and pursue life work.
7. Public school students must be provided the resources to compete favorably with neighboring districts and states in academics and job markets.

It is quite astonishing that a court case in 1989 outlined topics such as knowledge about cultural heritage, mental health, and vocational careers. These are all topics that are highly contested in

³⁶ Trish Brennan-Gac, *Education Rights in the States*, 2014

³⁷ Education Law Center, *Kentucky-Rose vs. Council for Better Education*

education today, yet it was clearly outlined how it should be in many states' legislation prior to the 21st century. Some of these capabilities will be reflected later, as they set up a clear point of reflection. Following this monumental court case, 12 more states added education to their constitutions in 1990, and by the end of the decade well over half had added similar legislation³⁸. It is important to note that nearly all of these court cases focused on allocation of resources to schools instead of the education itself; this was due to a standard of education having yet to be defined. The federal government was also assisting in the conversation regarding education. Lyndon B. Johnson highlighted the importance of education in his War on Poverty³⁹, Richard Nixon established the National Institute of Education, Jimmy Carter furthered this by establishing the Department of Education⁴⁰. Ronald Reagan established the National Commission of Excellence in Education which released a risk report that led to many conversations about the lack of standards in education⁴¹. Even with all of this reform, it wasn't until international tests in the mid 90's ranked the US poorly and raised a question as to the US's standing in the international community. Multiple international tests showed that the US education system was behind most other nations. One test, the PISA, ranked the US 20th in mathematics, 15th in science, and 16th in reading⁴². The government, who at the time was still confirming their spot as a top nation, quickly took action to remedy this. Only a few days after President George W. Bush's inauguration, he authorized an act that required states to issue yearly assessment exams that aligned with state standards⁴³. This initiated the national conversation about a common curriculum because of the difficulty of comparing states that had different

³⁸ Trish Brennan-Gac, *Education Rights in the States*, 2014

³⁹ El Barto was here - From the simpsons, Bart would graffiti this on buildings

⁴⁰ Ibid.

⁴¹ Ibid.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Trish Brennan-Gac, *Education Rights in the States*, 2014

standards. When in 2008, a partnership between the NGA⁴⁴ and CCSSO⁴⁵ was formed, the Common Core curriculum was eventually distributed to states in 2010⁴⁶.

Common Core, the most accepted common curricula program by states, has been in effect for over a decade as of 2022. There has been plenty of time to perfect the model and give a uniform education to all students. And yet, it faces challenges by both the education system, parents, and even students to this day. But in order to grasp the failure of Common Core, the goals of what the program set out to achieve must first be outlined. Common Core first set out to prepare students in the literacy aspects of their education. As outlined in Common Core Standards, these standards aimed to create “K–12 standards in order to help ensure that all students are college and career ready in literacy no later than the end of high school”⁴⁷. They do not hide that these standards are supposed to be very regulatory and strict. The goal is to produce students that know a baseline of information laid out by the organization. These standards even go into how teachers should be teaching the material they are given⁴⁸. The theory that Common Core based their standards off of is one that relies on the notion that students all learn the same. This has been the main point of contention when it came to their implementation. On top of that, a thought experiment can be held on this topic. If your mother asks you to wash the dishes, but you are busy doing homework so you refuse; would your response have changed if she said she has the expectation that you wash the dishes 3 times a week? Simply giving a group of people higher expectations does not guarantee better results. Studies have repeatedly proven the idea of

⁴⁴ National Governors Association

⁴⁵ Council of Chief State School Officers

⁴⁶ Ibid.

⁴⁷ Common Core, *Common Core State Standards*

⁴⁸ Tom Loveless, *Why Common Core failed*, 2021

‘how much students learn tomorrow is how much they know today’⁴⁹. A precursor to Common Core was the ‘Algebra for All’ initiative which put all 8th graders in Algebra 1 courses. The students were nearly universally unprepared for the course, and fell behind their peers of the same age⁵⁰. Not only did throwing them into this course set them up for failure for Algebra 1, but they could never recover from this failure. Almost all students who were forced into subsequently advanced math courses by the initiative faced repeated failure⁵¹. A similar fate is met by those students who falter in the Common Core curriculum because the standards given to states have no fail safe for students who fall behind in a subject. Intuitively, some may say having high standards is better than having low or no standards at all, although studies have shown that low standards cause no disparities like the one shown with high standards⁵². Common Core attempts to unify education by creating high standards under multiple false assumptions, and to measure their success they use the process of standardized testing. As defined by google, “Standardized tests are designed in such a way that the questions and interpretations are consistent and are administered and scored in a predetermined, standard manner”⁵³. In order to determine the success or failure of a standard education model, standardized tests are necessary. Similar to the implementation of common curricula, standardized testing has had a slew of issues.

⁴⁹ This is an idea that follows the notion of the knowledge you have today, is what enables you to learn the knowledge you are expected to learn tomorrow.

⁵⁰ Association for Psychological Science, *Early Predictors of High School Mathematics Achievement*, 2012

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Lynn D. Fielding, Jay Maidment, Christian N. K. Anderson, *Readiness for Entering Kindergarten: The Impact on Future Academic Achievement*

⁵³ Google, *Definition of Standardized Testing*

One of the biggest issues that surround standardized testing is that these exams are used in very high stakes situations such as college admissions. Current students go through 12 years of standardized education to then have one of their biggest life choices dependent on a single 3 hour exam. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, nearly all private universities required either the SAT or ACT exam to be taken by students. Due to this, many high schools prepare students specifically for these exams. If a high school can brag about their high test scores, then their parents may send their children to that school. There is also a financial influence that schools feel to have students score high on these exams that will be explored later. The process is pretty straight forward, a higher score on these exams equates to a well rounded and college-ready student. Having a single test for colleges to determine who is a right fit at their college sounds very nice, in the circumstance that these exams were meant for that purpose. Nearly all of the college readiness exams such as the SAT⁵⁴, MAT⁵⁵, CAT⁵⁶, ITBS⁵⁷, and CTBS⁵⁸ were designed to rank students, not rate them. All of these exams sought to have only half the test takers answer correctly to most of the items⁵⁹. This metric is very useful if utilized correctly. It can provide information about which states or school districts are behind compared to all other states. But by using these tests to rate students, it leads to a major disparity amongst student achievement. Here is an example to show how detrimental this disparity is. If you have 100 students all applying to MIT⁶⁰, they all must take the SAT. Let's assume that all of these students are more than smart enough to get into MIT, and have A+'s in every advanced class they have taken. Because of how the SAT was designed, only about 5 of these 100 students would get an MIT-worthy score. This

⁵⁴ Stanford Achievement Test

⁵⁵ Metropolitan Achievement Test

⁵⁶ California Achievement Test

⁵⁷ Iowa Test of Basic Skills

⁵⁸ Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills

⁵⁹ Alfie Kohn, *Standardized Testing and Its Victims*, 2000

⁶⁰ MIT has a 'minimum' SAT score of 1500

can be shown in reverse as well, where you have kids that have B-'s in all classes and are not prepared for the level of difficulty present at MIT, 5 of those students would have a high enough SAT score to get into MIT. If this was not bad enough, many outside agencies use these exam scores to rank the teaching at schools. Teachers in the first example that should be receiving praise for how well their students are doing, will receive the same praise as the teachers whose students were doing poorly in their classes⁶¹. In the process of high schools aiming to produce students that are of a higher pedigree than the rest of those taking these exams, they influence the students to learn superficially. In studies regarding elementary school students, those who were titled as 'actively learning' were asking questions about what they were learning and engaged in classes; those who were titled as 'superficially learning' only copied down the answers and skipped hard parts on exams instead of asking questions⁶². Further studies have shown that those who score well on college-readiness exam, such as the SAT, exhibit superficial learning⁶³. While there are students who think on these exams and score well, as well as those who don't, there is a positive correlation between those who score high and those who exhibit superficial learning. This means that those schools that are labeled as getting all of their students ready for college through high exam scores, are most likely teaching superficial learning habits to students. These superficial learning habits no longer are effective when students enter college and the workforce, and they suffer for it; but, even during their time in secondary schools they see many other effects of standardized testing.

⁶¹ This statement is under the assumption that teaching quality directly equates to student performance. While there is some correlation, many factors come into play at a greater degree. This does not degrade the point being made because the correlation is still relevant to the discussion.

⁶² Alfie Kohn, *Standardized Testing and Its Victims*, 2000

⁶³ Ibid.

When examining the effects of standardized testing, a good place to start is the examination of a commonly cited study in the field. Dr. Cannell published two books in the 1980's that examined the effects of standardized testing within schools⁶⁴. Within these books were the results of a few studies he had conducted in the 1980's. Cannell had taken off-the-shelf exams and given them to students in multitudes of states to determine the cause for test disparity⁶⁵. The evidence had attributed to educator dishonesty in the testing environment and lax security for exams to the Lake Wobegon effect⁶⁶ present in schools⁶⁷. These two attributes to standardized testing have been used to discredit the successes of standardized testing, although the study left out one crucial part of the testing experience. Most schools did not include high test security because there were no stakes attached to these exams⁶⁸. In reality, the high stakes of tests such as the SAT encourage schools to have high security to not be accused of educator dishonesty; which, can tarnish the schools exam scores and reputation⁶⁹. Lax security was not only causing the Lake Wobegon effect, it wasn't prevalent in high stakes testing. While the bounty is still out for what caused the Lake Wobegon effect, what is known are the effects on individuals. A study done in 2005 surveyed 341 teachers from schools of all backgrounds. The survey asked a multitude of questions that aimed to determine teachers' attitudes towards standardized testing⁷⁰. School administrators had given substantial attention to test preparation, and had many discussions with teachers on how to improve test scores⁷¹. Therefore, teachers feel

⁶⁴ *How All Fifty States Are above the National Average*, 1987; *How Public Educators Cheat on Standardized Achievement Tests*, 1989

⁶⁵ A disparity from students standardized exam scores and school grades

⁶⁶ Human tendency to overestimate one's capabilities compared to others. Named after a fictional town where 'all the children are above average'

⁶⁷ Richard P. Phelps, *Teaching to the test: A very large red herring*, 2016

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Herman, J.L. and Golan, S. , *The Effects of Standardized Testing on Teaching and Schools. Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 2005

⁷¹ Ibid.

a major pressure to improve students test scores, alter their instructional plans, and spend substantial time preparing students for tests⁷². This all results in teachers feeling personal responsibility for their students test scores⁷³. If a group of students score low on a standardized test, which can occur even with proper studying⁷⁴, the teachers would feel responsible for that. While the level of teaching ability is a factor in students performance, it is one of many factors such as resources available, test preparation materials, social and cultural influences outside of the classroom, and alignment of test material and instructional material⁷⁵. The effects of standardized testing is not only felt by the teachers, but the students as well. For reference, the amount our current educational model tests students is unprecedented in both our nation's history and the modern international system⁷⁶. *Nearly*⁷⁷ all specialists and experts in the educational field condemn basing important decisions such as college admissions upon a single exam⁷⁸. With all of the resources allocated to test taking, resources are being stripped from other programs such as the arts and building improvements⁷⁹. And while nearly all the evidence is stacked against standardized testing, teachers still tend to agree with the practice of standardized testing. To gain a better understanding of a teacher's perspective, I interviewed a previous teacher of mine.

Kathleen Schmitt is a social studies teacher at Webster Thomas High School. I have commonly used her as a model teacher in conversation due to her honest care of her students. She truly understood how her students learned, and adapted accordingly. I had interviewed her to

⁷² Herman, J.L. and Golan, S. , *The Effects of Standardized Testing on Teaching and Schools. Educational Measurement: Issues and Practice*, 2005

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ As outlined earlier in the paper

⁷⁵ Ibid.

⁷⁶ Alfie Kohn, *Standardized Testing and Its Victims*, 2000

⁷⁷ Nearly is used as a cover term because the amount of reputable sources that condemn this practice greatly outweigh the reputable sources that do not condemn it

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

ask questions similar to the questions asked in the 2005 study. When asked for her thoughts on effects of standardized testing, she said that “there is a goal set that students need to achieve”⁸⁰. Having this goal that students can tangibly see gave them something to strive for. At the same time, Schmitt did not believe that “testing is necessarily the best way to judge whether or not students have learned the material”⁸¹. This follows evidence from studies analyzed previously, that the testing we give students today is not a reflection of what the students truly know. There are many students who look at the grades they have received on these exams and use that to determine how smart they are. Schmitt contradicted this notion by describing how she has her kids look for improvement and growth in their exam scores⁸². When asked about the feeling of responsibility for students' exam scores, Schmitt said “I always feel responsible for it... You always look back and think ‘you know, what else could we have done’... you always think you can do something better from the year past”⁸³. This also follows the trends seen in the 2005 study, where teachers feel personal responsibility for their students' performance. Both Schmitt and the majority of teachers in that study changed their material from year to year in an effort to improve their students performance⁸⁴. My final question was about ways to determine students' achievement in any given subject, and without hesitation Schmitt said “In the way that they prefer to show you... The best way to have a kid show you what they know is for them to pick the method and do it”⁸⁵. This response did not follow any trends by any studies, but what it did reveal is that teaching is up to the students. You can have groups of teachers that are regarded as improving students' scores the most in the world, yet they will fail to teach students who learn in a different way than they teach. A student who prefers to present in front of the class may do

⁸⁰ Schmitt, Kathleen. Interviewed by William Small. Virtual. November 10, 2022

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

poorly on an exam because it is not their preferred way of showing their knowledge. It is important to understand students' learning methods, and adapt teaching to that; an anonymously created standardized test does not do this.

The efficacy of standardized testing and common curricula has been dissected and analyzed, but it would be of no use if there was not a possible solution to the problems outlined previously. In summary: common curriculum fails to properly prepare students for higher education, standardized tests are improperly used for important decisions, and efforts to raise test scores creates stress while taking away from other areas of education. Education models can be broken up into two extremes, one where you learn by testing and one where you learn by doing. This second extreme, known as apprenticeship, was common pre-industrialization where kids as young as 10 would move into a trade masters house and learn under them⁸⁶. Both extremes have their downsides and upsides, but what education should strive to be is somewhere in the middle. A mix which has been deemed 'contextualized learning'⁸⁷ is a combination of different aspects from both standardized testing and apprenticeship to give students a multitude of ways for them to express the knowledge they know. The idea of contextualized learning is very fluid, and opens up the floor for the students to make their own sense of what it means. While no educational model will be perfect, the goal should always be to create a realm of success for the students. In the words of one inspirational educator, "The best way to have a kid show you what they know is for them to pick the method and do it".

⁸⁶ Howard Gardner, *Assessment in Context: The Alternative to Standardized Testing*, 1992

⁸⁷ A term coined by Howard Gardner in his book *Assessment in Context: The Alternative to Standardized Testing*

Idealistically, there would be a simple conclusion that would wrap up all the information given so far into a cohesive short paragraph. But with how dense this information is, and the importance of the details, I find it more fitting to give a post-writing analysis of the information. As seen with the educational history of minority groups as well as how standardized testing came about, there are a lot of factors that come into play when looking at how we arrived at our current educational model. While not discussed in this paper, there are a plethora of research papers that show how standardized testing negatively impacts minority students to a greater extent than non-minority students. Logically, this makes sense due to the continued lower levels of education seen in those groups. This leads into the steps that were made to attempt to rectify the problem. This was conducted through the implementation of common curricula. The problems surrounding this are plentiful, but the biggest one arose from what information would be concluded within this curriculum. Controversial topics such as LGBTQ+ topics were highly contested upon whether or not they should be included in curriculum. Today we are seeing the constant struggle for these topics to be included in schools curriculums. There is additionally the ongoing debate over banned books and whether it is a violation of freedom of speech. I hope the information provided in this essay was ample enough to show why negating people's information almost never works. The idea of 'banned book' is quite fascinating in its own right. A book is a person's thoughts, dreams, personal beliefs put into a form that is palatable for consumers to create opinions on. But to ban a book, is to ban a person's beliefs or thoughts. The scary part is how light the topic is handled in schools. In my middle school, there was always a shelf of books that had been 'banned'. We had a 'banned book' week where we learned about books that had been banned. While we would *occasionally* talk about why a book was banned, the event was treated as a ploy to get us to read. The conversation was shifted from banning knowledge and

information to a light-hearted attempt to get kids to read⁸⁸. If you were to take a step outside of education, you would see a realm of social issues that have been previously analyzed in the school context. For the generational poverty affecting education, it affects nearly all aspects of those peoples lives. From the grocery stores they shop at, to the jobs they can get, to the infant death rates of those communities. The struggles of the LGBTQ+ community are nowhere near exclusive to the educational realm as well. The issue of this community is not exclusive to the US as well. There was a wonderful and comprehensive video essay published by a transgender women who went through the British healthcare system to acquire a consultation appointment for gender reassignment treatment⁸⁹. The British healthcare system had repeatedly violated her rights when she was simply wanting a consultation appointment for treatment that a cis-gendered woman could acquire without consultation. To look at any one of the issues outlined in this paper takes a lot of time due to how nuanced they are. The important thing to remember if you do decide to research something, something I learned while researching, is prepare to have your mind changed. There were countless times while researching for this paper that my mind had changed from what I previously believed. The facts are not always the truth, and the truth is not always right. The information, and analysis provided in this paper is merely to allow you to form an opinion of your own upon the topic. And as I have researched, my opinion has become that our current educational system has too many problems to be considered functioning. There are too many socio-political issues that surround education and separate parts of our lives that must first be addressed before we continue the conversation about education.

⁸⁸ I do believe kids should read books, but I do not believe shifting such an important conversation for that purpose is ethical

⁸⁹  I Emailed My Doctor 133 Times: The Crisis In the British Healthcare System

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