

More Than a Score: The Tie Between Assessments and Identity

Standardized testing has become a central feature of modern education. These assessments are designed to measure progress and identify gaps. The data can be valuable for all levels of education, but not when it comes at the cost of learning.

Psychologists define intrinsic motivation as driven by internal satisfaction and curiosity, while extrinsic motivation comes from wanting a reward or avoiding a negative outcome. Studies have consistently shown that intrinsic motivation fosters deeper understanding and engagement (Repovich). Unfortunately, standardized testing lives in an environment where students chase validation rather than understanding.

My first perfect score came in fifth grade, and I was moved to tears despite knowing I'd always been a strong student. The validation that came from a number became my favorite measure of success. My next few came in middle school, where perfect-scorers were rewarded with ceiling tiles to paint as permanent proof of our excellence. Achievement was public and praised at a school where struggle had long been the trend. So, when the next year came and brought me no perfect scores, I no longer knew how to define myself. Soon, the PSATs brought cutthroat comparisons between friends and became the origin of my SAT dread. But the need for standardized validation lived so deeply in me that I found myself sitting in a cold classroom at 8 a.m. on a Saturday far too many times.

Testing isn't inherently evil, but overreliance on it creates a mindset of teaching-to-the-test that's hard to escape. Students internalize every label that comes their way, and both students and educators become burnt-out while their feelings are hidden behind scores they won't

remember in 10 years. Yes, a score can indicate progress, but it's important to be reminded that worth doesn't lie in a number.

The struggle of standardized labels is personal—to me and to every other student who's been overwhelmed by a score. I see this every time my little cousins want to skip homework or one of my friends falls ill to senioritis. In those times of pressure and stress, it's okay to look at a number and take it for what it is: a number, not a defining moment. The defining moments are the ones you ask questions in, the ones you see an “a-ha!” in, and the ones you remember without dismay.

Works Cited

Repovich, Wendy. "Intrinsic and Extrinsic Motivation | EBSCO." *EBSCO Information Services, Inc.* | *Www.ebsco.com*, 2024, www.ebsco.com/research-starters/psychology/intrinsic-and-extrinsic-motivation.

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