

Why Standardized Testing is Important in the Homeschool Environment

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A standardized test is designed in such a way that the "questions, conditions for administering, scoring procedures, and interpretations are consistent" and it is "administered and scored in a predetermined, standard manner" (Wikipedia). To become a nationally standardized test, a test must go through rigorous reliability and validity testing.

Many misconceptions about large scale standardized testing exist. Stephen Sireci¹, has found that it is not full of flaws nor is it biased against minorities. These tests do usually assess what is taught on the national level, and help to set meaningful standards. Of course, a single test should not be used to determine high stake decisions. Moreover, we must remember students with disabilities and those with limited-English proficiency might need different tests or different test administrations. Still, they will benefit from the use of standardized testing.² Though standardized tests do have limitations, they are not inherently bad in and of themselves and can be very beneficial to the homeschool community.

Homeschoolers can benefit from many types of national standardized tests. The most common standardized tests used by homeschoolers include achievement tests like the CAT/5, Iowa, Stanford/10, and WJIII; and ability/IQ tests like the CogAT, OLSAT, WISC, and WJ COG. Homeschoolers might also take standardized college entrance and scholarship tests like the SAT, ACT, and PSAT. AP subject tests and COMPASS tests also help with college placement, while CLEPS and DANTES exams help students earn college credit even before reaching dual enrollment age or placing foot on a college campus.

The most common standardized tests used in homeschools are nationally standardized achievement tests like the CAT/5, Iowa, Stanford/10, and WJIII). The use of standardized achievement tests in homeschools can yield useful information and produce at least four important benefits.

First, standardized achievement tests can improve diagnosis of students' and teachers' strengths and weaknesses. One test should not suffice for the total end of grade assessment but hopefully, test results will corroborate what you see on a daily basis. Results can help guide us in knowing how a student compares to the average national student. If a child's scores seem to indicate that they are falling behind academically, we can get help instead of allowing the problem to persist. Likewise, a student that is performing above beyond their grade level might be given extra challenge, be placed into a gifted program, or be granted opportunities to pursue extra interests. Analyzing test results can help an educator evaluate the effectiveness of a curriculum or to help assess if instructional methods are a good match to a child's learning style. Clues to achievement strengths and weaknesses as well as instructional strengths or weaknesses can be ascertained from analyzing achievement test results.

Second, standardized tests can improve prediction and selection for gifted programs, college, scholarships, or employment. Results can be highly effective in identifying needs of exceptional students. Standardized test scores are an additional source of information to assess academic performance and a student's coursework, day-to-day test scores, homework, portfolios, and projects are other means of assessment. Achievement and ability tests can help describe a student's learning abilities, academic accomplishments and give reliable predication for college success.

Thirdly, the most controversial and least known benefit of standardized testing is that these tests can actually improve achievement. Richard P. Phelps³ has found an abundance of evidence demonstrating that students in schools with testing programs learn more than their counterparts in schools without testing mandates. An objective instrument and/or an outside source of assessment that is independent from teachers' observations helps give a positive influence on teaching methods and children's achievements. Teachers work harder to teach and students work harder to improve their scores or to show their accomplishments when they know they are being assessed.

Fourthly, and maybe most importantly, the community at large is sometimes skeptical of homeschooling so testing can help alleviate society's fears. Neighbors, grandparents, legislatures, and others want "proof" that homeschooling "works." Most homeschoolers score above the national average on national standardized achievement tests. We know there are so many other reasons we homeschool besides just the academics...but that is a whole other article about the benefits of homeschooling...

Your attitude determines a great deal about how a child might do on test day. Since testing is usually one of those things in life we have to do, let us approach it as a valuable tool that can encourage a student to do their best, help us as teachers become better teachers, and help homeschooling gain respect in the community at large.

1. Sireci, S. G. (2009). No more excuses: New research on assessing students with disabilities. *Journal of Applied Testing Technology*, 10 (2).
2. Kurt Geisinger. (2008). *Correcting Fallacies about Educational and Psychological Testing*.
3. Richard P. Phelps, 2008. The Role and Importance of Standardized Testing in the World of Teaching and Training, *Nonpartisan Education Review*, vol. 4(3), pages 1-9.

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