Gatekept: How America Has Failed At-Risk, Diverse, Low-Scoring Students Through the Use of Standardized Testing

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Abstract

For at-risk diverse students who score lower points on district/state/federal testing as well as on other standardized tests such as the SAT, (formerly known as the Scholastic Assessment Test), these students are gatekept out of higher-level courses in high school due to "teaching to the test" policies, gatekept out of entrance to expensive "test-prep" tutoring options, are examined unfairly by college admission offices under "test-optional" policies, and may ultimately be denied to better colleges. Consequently, given the current district/state/federal mandated testing systems in the United States and the stubbornness of high school administrators, state and federal lawmakers, school boards, college admission boards, etc., cling to antiquated practices of "college readiness" testing such as the SAT and favoring a classification system that reduces students to an invalid and static numeric answer instead of a fluid holistic representation is not only a travesty, but it is an unfair and biased system that needs to be reevaluated and reconstructed. Importantly, in the 21st century, there are better, more accurate, more comprehensive ways of showcasing student learning by way of the theory of multiple intelligence (Gardner, 1983), augmented theory of successful intelligence (Sternberg, 2012; 2015), and non-cognitive and critical thinking skills (Martin-Raugh et al., 2022).

Keywords: standardized testing, test-prep, test-optional, teaching to the test, multiple intelligence theory

What if their whole life was based on a lie or a series of lies? What if going through elementary, middle, and high school you were placed in lower-level courses and prevented from taking higher level courses that would have had a dramatic effect on your personal growth? What if on high stakes standardized tests, your entire future was unfairly and unjustly decided and was based on a lie that insisted in black and white numbers on the page that you were less intelligent. Consequently, it must feel awful to be locked out of education and out of life.

In this paper, I examine the impact of standardized test-taking practices on diverse low-scoring students, explain why standardized tests give false information about test-takers, and explore how these scores have a severe impact on these students' entire lives. The method that I use for my descriptive research study involves a critical review of the current literature on standardized test-taking practices and outcomes. My rationale for this study is to present empirically based research on why at-risk, diverse, low-scoring students are being oppressed in education today so that educators, parents, and policy-makers can better understand why this is happening so that meaningful changes to the current biased system can be made.

Theoretical Frameworks

The four theoretical frameworks through which I build a case of how America has failed its diverse at-risk students through standardized testing can be viewed through the conception of the following practices/theories: (a) socio-cultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978), (b) test bias (Sternberg, 2015; McCarthy et al., 2023), (c) multiple Intelligence theory (Gardner, 1983, 1993), and (d) self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977, 1986, 1997).

My first framework is sociocultural theory, which was theorized by Lev Vygotsky in 1978 as a result of studying how children grow and develop in literacy. Among many important breakthroughs in the educational/psychological field, Vygotsky discovered that from a very young age, children learn about their world collectively through social and cultural avenues that are not independent streets that have no connection to each other, but that are more like collectively flowing veins that bring ideas, experiences, backgrounds, culture, and connection together all at once to make meaning (Vygotsky, 1978). In this way, the actual nature of literacy is comprised of these very connections that cannot be separated from each other nor ignored. Therefore, when diverse at-risk students undertake a standardized test that has been developed by White, higher income, standard English-speaking members of the dominant society, then those tests are made for and by those homogenous images ignoring the other ethnic groups' social and cultural fabrics on the test and thereby making them more likely to fail.

Second, test bias serves as another important theoretical framework through which to understand how standardized tests are failing marginalized students. Like Vygotsky (1978), both Sternberg (2015) and McCarthy et al. (2023) maintained that standardized testing is the very representation of the dominant society's cultural and socioeconomic norms, negating the norms of other ethnic groups, which may render standardized tests ineffective and invalid. For example, the design of the tests by the test-makers and the taking of the tests by the test-takers when both are comprised of the same backgrounds gives a major advantage to these homogeneous test-takers and consequently has the opposite effect on the other ethnic groups of society who do not share those same norms of culture nor income level (Canché et al., 2025). Further, Sternberg (2015) heavily criticized standardized testing for only addressing analytical skills which are prized by the dominant culture to the exclusion of practical, creative, and wisdom-based skills

which would showcase students' talents holistically. While Sternberg (2015) centered more on the breadth of genres largely ignored by the dominant culture, McCarthy et al. (2023) centered on the depth of those abilities as they apply to the acquisition of language skills. Importantly, McCarthy et al. (2023) discussed the lack of multicultural and linguistic differences that non-native speakers of English face when tested on flat text as it appears on standardized tests because reading prosody is developed through social and cultural means that may not be recognized as the powerful tools of knowledge that they are, especially when standardized testing only reflects a monolithic mindset excluding the connections that need to be strengthened through dwelling in both the native and non-native language of the test-taker in order for reading prosody to occur.

My third theoretical framework, Howard Gardner's (1983, 1993) multiple intelligence (MI) theory, represents my ideology towards viewing standardized tests as inaccurate, harmful, and incomplete portrayals of all standardized test-takers, but especially for marginalized test-takers. Gardner, through his vast body of work concerning what constitutes intelligence theorized that there is no g factor when classifying what intelligence embodies. Importantly, Gardner does not believe in the traditionally peddled and narrowly fixated opinion that intelligence somehow is present from birth and spans three areas: verbal, mathematical, and spatial. Instead, Gardner believes that every person has, to some degree, not only those three aforementioned intelligences, but they have at least six more intelligences—naturalist, musical, existential, kinesthetic, intrapersonal, and interpersonal—which are discounted and disregarded by the dominant group in power through standardized testing because these six additional intelligences present intelligence in a holistic way that cannot be captured, bottled, and labeled with numbers. In fact, by using Gardner's theory of intelligence, all standardized tests as we know them would

be defunct. The test-making-taking machine would leave those in power over how to categorize, sort, and reduce students to comforting numbers on a page, over one-billion dollars poorer and conversely would return that money to showcasing an entire picture of each individual student that champions all of their abilities rather than only some of them. Importantly, all student test-takers, and especially at-risk diverse students, are being disadvantaged and stymied through an unfair standardized testing system that does not recognize how their specific cultural and social backgrounds contribute to the development of these nine intelligences.

My fourth theoretical framework sits within the body of research by Albert Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997) and his self-efficacy theory. Bandura (1986) theorized that the self-perceived abilities, mindsets, and attitudes of students contribute greatly to their success or failure of set-tasks and performances on standardized tests. If marginalized students from lower-income and poorer school districts do not see standardized testing as representative of themselves and their capabilities then this belief will widen the chasm even further by anchoring their scoring on these exams to incorrect ideas of lower self-worth and performance. In this way, marginalized students see themselves only through the lens of how those who are in power see them, and an unnecessary self-fulfilling prophecy is unjustly allowed to continue in America today when all the while those in the dominant norm exhibit ignorance, willfulness, and act only in self-interest to retain power by continuing to require biased, inaccurate, and unfair standardized testing that is only designed to maintain power and depress the power of other American ethnic groups (McCarthy et al., 2023; Sternberg, 2015).

Literature Review

My aim is to show how standardized tests are biased against at-risk, diverse students and that these tests are presented as intelligence tests that are then used by schools and the state and

federal governments to categorize and label students in the narrowest of ways instead of employing other viable methods that have proven to be effective with diverse students to explore practical skills, creativity, wisdom, and knowledge instead of using the present biased system that only recognizes verbal and analytical skills as those skills that signify intelligence.

The analysis of my literature review can be situated within six important areas connected to my theoretical frameworks:

- Bias in standardized testing
- Detrimental "teaching to the test" practices
- Exclusive "test-prep" access
- Harmful "test-optional" policies
- Negative impact of stress and anxiety on test takers
- Better methods for showcasing student knowledge, creativity, and skills

Each of these six elements of standardized testing set up at-risk, diverse, low-scoring students to be misidentified as lacking, unintelligent, untalented, and/or otherwise unworthy of achieving at a high level of education at the K–12 levels or in higher education. (Robinson & Robinson, 2022). Once students are given these inappropriate labels, they are deemed to be intellectually and socially out of the norm (e.g., disabled, limited in ability) and, thus are left behind in their classes intellectually (e.g., given lower-level and less stimulating curricula) and socially (e.g., ostracized by their peers). This, of course, leads to widening the gap between these students and their so-called normal peers each year of school (Armstrong, 2012).

Bias in Standardized Testing

Standardized tests have the test-takers believing that they are, as students and people, equal to the number that is stamped onto the score report. If that score is low, then school

personnel, other students see these low scoring students—and students may see themselves—as unintelligent or "abnormal" (Armstrong, 2012). Yet, Sternberg (2015) through his successful intelligence theory, and Aguayo et al. (2021), through the use of multiple intelligence theory postulated that standardized tests only address two (i.e., verbal and mathematical) of the nine known intelligences, ignoring wisdom and creative and practical skills in favor of only analytical skills (Sternberg, 2015). Further, standardized tests such as the SAT, (formerly the Scholastic Assessment Test), ignore the backgrounds of at-risk, diverse learners and favor those of White Eurocentric students giving the illusion that the tests are measuring what is important (McCarthy et al., 2023; Tierney & Pearson, 2021). Specifically, a major problem—of the past and of today—that exists in standardized testing is its exclusive use of academic English, which is biased towards White and middle and upper-class students, rather than the incorporations of other dialects and language backgrounds of at-risk diverse students. Even though all dialects are deemed equal, linguistically-speaking, there is still the upholding of academic English as being more acceptable and more advanced (Breland, 2025; MacSwan, 2018).

Additionally, Santelices and Wilson (2010) found that after retesting Freedle's (2003) scoring method on the verbal section of the SAT, the verbal section favored White Eurocentric test-takers and disenfranchised African American test-takers.

Importantly, the *2023 College Board SAT Suite of Assessments Annual Report* demonstrated how far fewer White students are scoring lower scores on the SAT as compared to at-risk diverse students. Specifically, for all high school students who graduated in 2023 who took the SAT and scored under 1,000 points, these were the results reported by race: White students, 34%; Two or More Races, 35%; Black students, 71%; Hispanic students, 64%; Asian students, 17%; Native Hawaiian students, 68%; and Native American Indian students, 73%

(College Board, 2023, p. 7). Bleakly, nationally, data compiled by the 2018 *Brown Center Report on American Education: How Well Are American Students Learning* (Quintero et al., 2018), also showed gaps between diverse students and their White peers.

Now, colleges, that have implemented other ways (than testing) to develop their student population, are under attack by the federal government and other groups as discriminating against White students. In this way, at-risk diverse students who score lower points on standardized tests like the SAT could be gatekept out of more competitive colleges that seek students with higher SAT scores. Additionally, these students may decide to not even apply to college as a result of their lower test scores and, in all likelihood, their lower sense of confidence and self-esteem (Dodge, 2009; Kearns, 2011).

Detrimental "Teaching to the Test" Practices

"Teaching to the test" is a detrimental practice because it oppresses at-risk diverse students. Specifically, these students are gatekept out of higher-level courses because they have scored lower on standardized tests and are forced by the school system to take and retake courses that will "teach to the test." Historically, when the federal government passed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2001), the Common Core State Standards Act (CCSS, 2010), and the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA, 2015), the premise was well-intentioned: Keep striving to provide a better and equal education for all students.

Ostensibly, the latter act, ESSA (2015), has come the closest to making this governmental premise a reality by not just providing the promise of an equal education, but by providing one that is more inclusive for all students (Midgette, 2025). However, the outcome for many at-risk, diverse students is far from good. By placing school districts and students into strict categories of what is deemed as acceptable scoring brackets, the federal government has set up meaningless

parameters which hold students and school districts accountable for student test-performance. And, if students do not score well on these tests, then the government can withhold funding for that school district (Moje et al., 2020).

Therein lies the problem. Many lower-scoring students are diverse learners who are then placed together in lower-level courses that are designed to "teach to the test" where these students stay on a perpetual "merry-go-round" loop where they are learning only the material that is required for the test—even if that takes the entire school year—or years—to do so. This practice comes at the expense of at-risk diverse students gaining access to higher-level classes such as advanced placement (AP) and honors courses where their critical and creative thinking skills would be greater exercised instead of atrophied.

Particularly, Rubel (2011) found that due to New York State testing laws that required high school students to pass certain math tests in order to graduate from high school, many lower-scoring students were placed in classes where for 4 years, the highest math level that they were allowed to complete was Algebra I. Similarly, Ramsay-Jordan (2020) found that because the math curriculum of Georgia was so narrowly focused on standardized testing that preservice secondary school math teachers were only able to "teach to the test," instead of being able to leverage their predominantly Black students' backgrounds using culturally responsive teaching practices, which would have strengthened their students' success in class and broadened their knowledge of math.

Therefore, the practice of the federal government providing unequal funding to schools based on standardized test-performance creates unequal environments for at-risk diverse learners due to lack of invested money in lower socio-economic status school districts which leads to inequalities between poorer and richer schools, with poorer schools paying the price (Ramsay-

Jordan, 2020). Ultimately, "teaching to the test" leads to significant restrictions for at risk diverse students regarding the broader curriculum and leads to greater student drop out/push out rates (Leistyna, 2007).

Exclusive "Test-Prep" Access

Standardized testing is a billion-dollar industry in the United States (Ujifusa, 2021; Williams, 2024). Because tests like the SAT are so astronomically important to students—and their parents—wanting to gain entry to the best colleges, hundreds of millions of dollars are spent on test-preparation programs by parents from higher socioeconomic backgrounds who can afford these "test prep" tutoring programs that give predominantly White students a major advantage over their at-risk, diverse peers (Leistyna, 2007). But it is not just at the high school level where White students are excelling. Students from higher socioeconomic environments are outperforming their lower socioeconomic status peers from birth to grade three and onward unless specific intervention strategies are employed (D'Angiulli et al., 2004).

Perhaps the most striking finding regarding which conditions greatly affect students' literacy development is the fact that "access to print" (e.g., books, magazines) in these following four ways: in the home; in the students' community setting; in the students' town libraries; and in the students' schools was staggeringly less abundant in the environments of students from lower socioeconomic settings (Neuman & Celano, 2001). Indeed, the students' social environment—from the micro-system (of the home environment) to the macro-system (of the larger cultural group setting) has a significant impact on how students make sense of and gain information about their world (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, as cited in Neuman & Celano, 2001).

Crucially, at-risk, diverse students are stymied not through personal shortcomings or capabilities that poverty and social inequality might wrongly imply, but poverty and social

inequality occur because these students are being shut out of the very institutions that would give them similar advantages to their higher-income peers (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 2005, 2009, as cited in Kromydas, 2017). For example, even though the rates of Black and Hispanic students in college enrollment have risen over the years, there is still a significant gap nationwide where almost twice as many White students earn college degrees than Black students do, and where White students earn college degrees at almost three times the rate of Hispanic students (Sturm et al., 2011).

"Test-prep," therefore, has a very long-reaching arm that stretches from the point of gaining access to expensive SAT tutoring, for instance, all the way back to what affordances the students' environment (home, community, school) has given them. "Test-prep," then, can be seen as an exclusive phenomenon that skews in favor of White, higher socio-economic status students (Park & Becks, 2015; Sternberg, 2012).

Harmful "Test-Optional" Policies

"Test-optional" policies hurt rather than help at-risk, diverse, low-scoring students seeking entrance into college (Belasco et al., 2014). In order to understand why this is true, it is necessary to understand that "test-optional" policies do just the opposite: They boost colleges' standings. "Test-optional" policies enormously help colleges to advance their national rankings, while colleges simultaneously and unfairly scrutinize the educational institutions of at-risk diverse students. Specifically, when colleges offer "test-optional" policies, lower-scoring students do not submit their test scores. In this way, the colleges can then report that the students who attend their colleges are performing in a higher bracket of SAT scores, which results in those colleges looking more desirable and improving their standing in the *U.S. News and World Report* and other journalistic rankings of colleges (Belasco et al., 2014).

Additionally, Belasco et al., (2014) found that it was even harder for lower-scoring diverse students to get admitted to colleges because if these students chose not to submit their test scores, then the admission offices of the colleges that they had applied to would more closely scrutinize their high school's curriculum and extra-curricular activities. But, for many diverse low-scorers of standardized tests, their school districts do not offer an extensive array of upper-level courses, nor do they have an abundance of extra-curricular activities to offer their students. So, these students are viewed less-favorably in the admission process. Consequently, these at-risk, diverse, low-scoring students are then in jeopardy of not being accepted to competitive colleges (Sternberg, 2015).

Negative Impact of Stress and Anxiety on Test Takers

In their study, "Teacher and parent views on standardized testing: A cross-cultural comparison of the uses and influencing factors," Donegan and Trepanier-Street (1998) surveyed the views of Middle Eastern and White parents and White teachers about the use of and experience with standardized testing. While many parents reported that their children did not experience much stress and anxiety over these tests, all of the teachers had reported experiencing "considerable personal stress" especially within the upper elementary grades (p. 92). Essentially, most teachers reported that they had observed at times visible stress in their standardized test-taking students in the form of acting out or crying as these students progressed through their elementary school years.

Likewise, in her qualitative study "High-stakes standardized testing and marginalized youth: An examination of the impact on those who fail," Laura-Lee Kearns (2011) examined the damaging impact standardized test-taking had the mindset of marginalized Canadian secondary school students when they failed the exam, producing within them a sense of personal shame and

humiliation over the results (pp. 118–122). Similarly, in their quantitative study, "The relations among mathematics anxiety, gender, and standardized test performance," Anis et al. (2016) found that those test-takers who had reported higher levels of text-anxiety had scored significantly lower scores on the SAT than those test-takers who had reported lower levels of text-anxiety.

Through examining this issue of anxiety and stress over taking standardized tests, it has become evident that there is not an overwhelming amount of research on this topic. However, since my area of interest also concerns the negative self-image of low-scoring test-takers, more studies—perhaps qualitative ones, like narrative and ethnographic inquiries (Johnson, 2021)—need to be conducted to really understand how diverse, low-scoring, test-takers feel about themselves and the system to which they are being subjected to which entraps them in a hard-to-break cycle of pressure to excel on these biased standardized tests and gatekeeps them out of going to college or out of going to a more desirable college—either pathway of which would have a profound impact on these students lives. Specifically, in her ethnography, *Misplaced Blame, Decades of Failing Schools, Their Children, and Their Teachers*, Bonnie Johnson (2021) addressed these issues. She examines how the specter of the potential loss of federal funding leads to a single-minded focus on teaching to the standardized test at the exclusion of all else. The subsequent anxiety and stress affect the marginalized students, their teachers, and their districts, and ultimately causes harm in spite of whatever positive intent these policies originally held.

Better Methods for Showcasing Student Knowledge, Creativity, & Skills

Several highly regarded researchers who shaped the field of multiple intelligences are Dr. Howard Gardner (1983, 1993), Dr. Robert J. Sternberg (2015), and Dr. Carol Dweck (2006,

2016, 2022). These researchers have helped provide enormous insight into how we as people can view intelligence not only in the traditional realms of math and verbal abilities, but in other more advanced and holistic ways.

In reviewing Harvard professor Dr. Howard Gardner's (1983, 1984, 1993) work on his theory of multiple intelligences (MI), it is clear that Gardner sees intelligence not as having a singular component, but as one in which many different intelligences are involved, including these nine: visual-spatial, verbal-linguistic, musical-rhythmic, logical-mathematical, interpersonal, intrapersonal, naturalistic, bodily-kinesthetic, and existential. Moreover, Aguayo et al. (2021), in their research on infusing MI into students' classrooms, produced the result that "significant differences were found between the EG (experimental group) and the CG (control group), with the EG obtaining a higher mean in the variables analyzed in favour of the EG" (p. 1). Aguayo et al. (2021) indicated that students displayed more creative and higher-level thinking and products.

Professor and psychologist, Dr. Robert J. Sternberg, has been a leader in the philosophy of multiple intelligence theories from his work over the years of 1988–2015 regarding his augmented theory of successful intelligence which involves being able to perform through creative skills (using novel ideas), analytical skills (assessing self-performance), practical skills (ability to put ideas into working order), and wisdom-based skills (self-assessing ideas as good) (Sternberg, 2015).

Further, Sternberg (2012), through the Rainbow Project, a study that introduced creative and practical thinking skills along with analytical skills into the college application process—not affecting admission decisions—and found that it "reduced ethnic-group differences by a substantial amount—those differences were considerably less than they are on the SAT. Thus,

we increased prediction at the same time that we decreased differences due to ethnicity. This is not a common result" (p. 8).

Similarly, in Sternberg's (2012) Advanced Placement Project study, creative and practical thinking skills were inserted into AP tests in psychology, statistics, and physics. Sternberg found, "We were able to increase construct validity and reduce ethnic-group differences. When we got these promising results, that funding ended as well" (p. 8).

Finally, Sternberg (2012) found through his action research study, the Kaleidoscope Project, where college admission decisions, this time at Tufts University, were based on the open-ended test questions collected from his study, that his students' scores on this voluntary admission test showed "no ethnic-group differences, a result stronger than we had obtained with Rainbow" (p. 10). Sternberg ethically mentioned that he did not know whether his results were impacted by the fact that the test scorers did not know the ethnicity of test takers in the Rainbow Project study, whereas test scorers did know the ethnicity of test takers in the Kaleidoscope Project (Sternberg, 2012). However, it is important to also note that the number of applications rose from the population of at-risk diverse students at Tufts University during the years 2005–2010 of Sternberg's studies.

Furthermore, psychologist and professor, Dr. Carol Dweck (2006, 2016), is noted for her work on fixed versus growth mindset. In her book, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (2006, 2016), Dweck posited that having a growth mindset fosters growth and success because it challenges the person to see their abilities as being fluid rather than fixed. In this way, growth occurs when abilities are focused on and stretched through experience.

Through the work of these aforementioned specialists in the field of multiple intelligences (MI), it can be understood that there is more to a person's overall composition than

just their mathematical and verbal/reading abilities. While attempting to capture student intelligence in a bottle that can then be labeled and categorized as intelligence, standardized testing is harming not only how diverse low-performing students view themselves and of how the world sees them, but it confines intelligence to a single, unreliable approach, rather than as a genuine, multidimensional, holistic way to represent a person's intellectual abilities and characteristics.

Pace Miles and Fletcher (2021) maintained that reading development does not happen in a linear and unidimensional fashion and that it is a fallacy that test makers and curriculum developers peddle to break reading skills into stacked and testable parts that may appear to be telling a story about the ability of the test-taker but instead show an inaccurate and flat picture of the reading competency of the test-taker as every reader has a depth, complexity, and uniqueness that cannot be distilled into simple stamped scores as a one-size-fits-all approach with which to judge all reading development.

Moreover, Sacks (1997) argued for "authentic" assessment such as "performance assessment" (p. 25). The author posited that students should be graded on what they are able to do and not on how well they can take a test. Other ways to assess student learning could include portfolios, art and science projects, and writing collections.

In moving forward and finding better ways to display student growth and multifaceted intelligence, two studies showed promising results. First, Mahlangu (2019) concluded that colleges should be using capabilities approach to its admission criteria instead of relying on defunct standardized testing because there are many more important factors to consider when admitting students into higher education such as their personal qualities, how well they learn, how well they perform at tasks, and what life skills they are competent in (p. 183).

Similarly, Martin-Raugh et al., (2022) demonstrated in their study that noncognitive skills and critical thinking skills predict college GPA and that colleges and universities should highly consider these skills as part of their admission decision-making process rather than depending on biased and inconclusive standardized tests such as the SAT (p. 350).

Conclusions

In conclusion, what I believe is America's wrong and rigid objective of labeling students and categorizing them in tiers of lower to higher intelligence based on the numerical results stamped onto biased standardized test reports needs to change. In its current state, I firmly believe this process oppresses at-risk, diverse, low-scoring students and seeks to gatekeep them into lower-level classes and lower-level colleges, all the while undermining students' confidence and catering to these students' potentially negative images of themselves.

Because standardized-testing is a major money-making machine in the United States with the SAT enriching test-preparation and test-manufacturing companies, and with state and federal policies in place that can withhold funding from underperforming districts unless they meet arbitrary scoring brackets, from my experiences and observations in schools, I have found a biased, unjust, and unfair system has been pushed for decades that favors and caters to the White Eurocentric population.

In a myriad of ways, standardized tests negatively and unfairly gatekeep the lives of at-risk, diverse, lower-scoring students due to these findings:

1. Standardized tests are biased.
2. Teaching to the test is detrimental.
3. Test-Prep access is exclusive.
4. Test-Optional policies are harmful.

5. Stress and anxiety negatively impact test takers.
6. Better methods of assessment can demonstrate knowledge, creativity, and skills.

If this oppression of diverse, low-scoring, standardized test-takers is to be banished, more research, more open-minded lawmakers, and more honesty is needed to remedy the wrongs that continue to plague and have a serious impact on the outcome of these students' lives (Moje et al., 2020; Tierney & Pearson, 2021).

If we genuinely want to make education equal and equitable for all students, we have to go a step further and make it inclusive to all students of all backgrounds and ethnicities (Midgette, 2025). However, if we continue to use standardized testing as it is currently designed and used in our school systems today, we are continuing to perpetuate social injustices that are based on biased exams that are used inaccurately as intelligence tests that seek to oppress at-risk diverse students in all aspects of their lives—and in their livelihoods (Johnson, 2021; Midgette, 2025; Sacks, 1997; Sternberg, 2012).

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