Standardized Testing:
Mend It, Don’t End It

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The Testing Debate

Reformers:
- Test all grades and subjects every year
- Track students over time
- Report results and use for accountability

Critics:
- Capture critical thinking, writing, more subjects
- End high stakes
- Don’t use tests for teacher evaluation
- Boycott tests

Researcher perspective:
Need outcomes to evaluate what works.
How to Make Progress?

- Clarify terms to get on the same page
- Set criteria for good assessments
- Monitor the test vendors and demand the best
1. Standardized Testing

- Standardized means everyone takes the same test under the same conditions
- Not to be confused with item format (e.g., multiple choice)
- Constructed response item formats, such as in performance assessments, can be standardized
2. Teaching to the Test

- Teaching *narrowly* to the test
  - Emphasize test-taking strategy over content

- Teaching to the domain of the test
  - Test items should be a random sample of items, testing all possible elements of course content
  - Teachers should cover all content from which the test items are sampled
“Norm-referenced” and “criterion-referenced” are not properties of tests but of test interpretation.
4. High-Stakes Tests

- High-stakes *decisions* are being made
  - Teacher hiring, promotion, assignment, compensation, remediation
  - Education interventions, sometimes costly
  - What information are we using?
  - Imperfect information versus no information

- What about the test produces the anxiety?
  - Difficulty mismatch
  - Burdensome format
  - Time pressure
Properties of Good Assessments

- **Valid**
  - Measures what we care about
  - No bias (no “DIF”)

- **Reliable**
  - Multiple scorers would give the same score
  - Discriminating over the range of proficiency

- **Noncorruptible**
  - Cheating can be detected, prevented
  - Must elicit students’ best effort

- **Meaningful, with minimal burden**
  - Students can learn from the test

- **Interpretable**
  - Supports decision making to improve teaching and learning
Conclusions

- Standardized testing doesn’t have to be multiple choice, but standardization is not the problem

- If a test is aligned to the curriculum, teaching to it (broadly) would be a good thing

- It can be useful to compare test takers to each other as well as to absolute standards

- The cost of making tests better is less than the cost of making hard decisions with no evidence