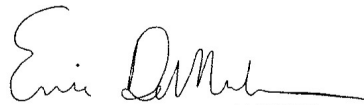# Standardized Testing: The Hushed Industry of Cultural White Washing

**Praxis Project Thesis: Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree of Bachelor of Arts — as part of the Community, Youth,
and Education Studies Major at Clark University**
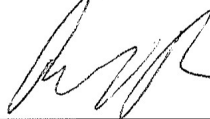
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ABSTRACT

There is widespread frustration over the negative impacts of standardized testing among students, parents, educators and educational researchers. Despite the frustration, only a few places in the country have developed significant movements in which parents opt their children out of the mandated standardized tests. This study reveals the cultural marginalization that students can avoid by opting-out of the testing system. Avoiding the implications of cultural bias can prevent the possible detriment of a child's academic success, and provide an opportunity for a higher success rate among students, regardless of a child's race, ethnicity or language.

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INTRODUCTION

My memories leap back to the spring of 2018 when I was mentoring as a side teacher at a local public high school, relatively close to my university. For several months I attended the same freshman English course, two times a week with the same class of students. The students would all file into our classroom with the same gloom every time, only with a growing agony to do so with each day that continued in the school year. Among all of the issues which I noticed within that classroom, I was mostly bothered by three things: the great teaching that was being overlooked by its students, the large impact of mandated testing practice in regular class time, and the lack of student motivation that linked to this pattern of teaching.

It hurt for me to watch a passionate teacher carry the same ambition into their classroom every day to the same gloomy sets of eyes and wandering minds that were always distinctly somewhere else. The teacher's integrity, ability, and genius were more than qualified for our students but because the system was forcing him to use his time in the classroom to prepare them for standardized testing, the focus of the English content was long lost. I would follow the same motions every time I came in: assess the standardized test prompt with them, take any questions and get going, making my rounds to answer more one-on-one questions. The largest problem with this? It constrained me and the teacher from having the ability to break from the test content and to connect with our students on a personal level.

Now not every student is necessarily dependent on the catering of interest and attention from their teacher, but usually every class has at least one student that has behavior that stands out from the rest. Reflecting on my first class session at this high school, it became quite apparent to me that one student in my English class was bringing with them tensions from home to school.

Our student, Jamal, had behavior which usually overrode the expected attitude of his peers and the work which was expected of him by the school was almost never fulfilled. My co-teacher partner and I struggled to find a place of understanding with Jamal, who made such an effort to conceal his interests from us, as well as the class.

As that semester drew on for me, I continued to strive to listen, ask thoughtful questions and provide attention to Jamal. On my last day working with the class, he had an outburst of frustration in the classroom, cussing out the day's classroom activity, kicking other students' papers off their desks, throwing pencils across the classroom. He marched out of the classroom with his arms crossed tightly across his chest. More than his initial frustration, what truly astonished me was what he did after marching out of the classroom. He faithfully stood outside of the classroom, patiently waiting for my work partner to write him up or call the school security guard to come gather him for the main office. I couldn't understand why Jamal would go as far as to disrupt the classroom but still stand faithful to owning up to it. It almost seemed as though… he wanted to be anywhere but that classroom, but something was still holding him to it. Could it have been fear of the school system? Or fear of my partner? Or was it simply resignation to the system? These are all possibilities but I suppose I will never fully know.

I moved out of the classroom and asked Jamal what was bothering him so much in that moment. I figured that we had no plans on changing his behavior at this point, but instead he replied with a jumble of muffled tears. What Jamal was struggling with was not the classroom or the teaching, it was his family life; the problems behind closed doors, the part of a student that schools seem to expect of them to erase when they enter the school doors. I could go on and on about the heart wrenching issues that this student faced in his day-to-day life, but the point he made to me was that sitting down, listening to a list of questions and answers was clearly not at the top

of his priority list. And quite frankly? I completely agreed with him. Why *should* a student prioritize one test grade over the rest of their life? It left me torn between the emotions that he shared with me that day and seeing the loss of opportunity for English which was taken from him all for the sake of standardized "education." Jamal was only one of the thousands of students who are expected to take and pass the annual MCAS test in order to graduate.

This moment reflects a lot of emotion for me. It contributes to the frustration that I have grown to feel against the use of standardized testing across this country. It shows the detrimental strain that testing has on students, the power it has to strip great teachers from being successful or considered valid, and it even is the proof that student-teacher relationships are being harmed by them. This is the big monster of education that me and my research partners vowed to tackle while in Worcester, Massachusetts. Studies have proven that precarious testing has negative impacts on the teaching ability of educators as well as the organic learning style that is necessary for students. Linked to the pressures that come from testing, students today are struggling more than ever to comprehend subject matter. They are losing the desire to learn, their creativity is being lost, as well as their imagination and curiosity, and in worst cases, some students are forced to drop out of school (Swinson, 2018).

According to a research article released by Penn State in 2019, states are spending an average of $1.7 billion per year just on testing. And among 45 of the states, over $669 million is being spent each year on primary assessment contracts to ensure the usage of standardized testing (OMT, 2019). The funds being sourced through this system of testing could be used otherwise, such as in strengthened technology systems, more experienced school staff, or updated textbooks/school supplies.

Unfortunately, large testing systems today exert much power over the school system and they are not being questioned enough - or held responsible for the burden they have placed on our schools. A research study developed by Harvard professor, Heather Hill, discovered that standardized testing decreases instructional quality, even in school districts that have the highest-rated educational quality. Teachers have no choice but to allocate more time teaching mnemonics than to make sense of proper procedures for answering questions and significant portions of class time are spent reviewing test formatting. All of this takes away from necessary lesson instructions (Barrington, 2018).

<p style="text-align:center">***</p>

It was the goal of my research, along with my two research partners, to demonstrate these truths about high-stakes standardized tests to the families and educators of students who are forced to take them and to make them aware of the ability to opt their children out of them. We hoped that by educating parents on the problems with the high-stakes standardized testing and the opportunities of opting their children out of taking these tests, that the activism within our work would begin a conversation among families for educational change within the Worcester community. One could consider this work to be a mere step towards change but I would argue that our intentions are only the beginning of a much larger strike against the current damaging testing practices occurring in our schools.

While my partners and I shared a broad goal of exploring the general harms of standardized testing, the essence of this paper is framed around the particular harms of testing that were significant to my own learning. This study unravels how racially segregated academic achievement has been created by American politics, thus perpetuating how students of color, and English Language Learners, have been strategically disadvantaged in the school systems.

I will be analyzing the educational effects made by the No Child Left Behind policy ("NCLB"), which I believe to be inherently racist to students of color. Students in Massachusetts must pass the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment exam ("MCAS") to receive their high school diploma; this expectation is enforced by the NCLB Act's educational initiatives. I argue that students taking the MCAS exam are being subject to the negative racial effects which are rooted in the affects led by the NCLB Act.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE ON STANDARDIZED TESTING

Partially Co-Written with Sophia Poulin and Aidan Moffatt

The history of standardized testing in the United States dates back to the early 1900's. The first usage of a standardized test occurred during World War I when the United States Military instituted the Army Alpha and Beta tests in 1917 (Singer, 2019). These tests, created by the then President of the American Psychological Association, Robert M. Yerkes, were used to measure the intelligence of the recruits. Specifically, the goal of these tests was to determine which recruits were "mentally inferior" and which were considered to have "superior mental ability". The basis of these tests was also of eugenicist ideals where it was thought that people of color would have a lower IQ, making it another reason why people of color were unable to serve in the military. Within the next ten years, the institution of standardized testing emerged for schools. Carl Bringham, an enthusiastic member of the eugenics movement, designed the Scholastic Aptitude Test, or the SAT. The first usage was in 1926. The test, distributed to high school students, was used as a form of gatekeeping to predict who would excel in college and who would not (Singer, 2019).

In 1959, a professor at the University of Iowa, Franklin Lindquist, created American College Testing, or ACT (Fletcher, 2009). This test included a section that was intended to guide students towards a profession through asking questions about their interests. The ACT tests students in the areas of math, reading, English usage, and scientific principles. What makes the ACT different from the SAT is the composition of the test. The ACT is geared towards measuring accumulated information from an individual whereas the SAT is centered on testing logic (Fletcher, 2009).

In 1993 a law was passed in Massachusetts that aimed to improve public education across the state (McCaleb-Kahan & Wenner, 2009). This law resulted in the creation of the Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System (MCAS) to meet the requirements of the new law. "The MCAS testing program assesses all students including special needs students and LEP (limited English proficient) students enrolled in public schools" (McCaleb-Kahan & Wenner, 2009, p. 2). The MCAS test is also a graduation requirement in the state of Massachusetts (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education). Each student must earn a passing score in English Language Arts, mathematics, and one science test (biology, chemistry, introductory physics, or technology/engineering). If these tests are not passed by 10th grade, students may retest until they earn a passing grade in order to graduate (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education).

Massachusetts was one of the first states to adopt statewide mandated standardized tests in the country. The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 mandated and popularized standardized tests nationwide. This act brought testing to the top of the nation's educational agenda (Yaffe et. al., 2008). States were then mandated to test students in reading and math among grades 3 through 8, and once more in high school (Washington Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction). The

aim of this policy was to close the academic achievement gaps through identifying struggling districts and students and providing them with assistance (Yaffe et. al., 2008). Written in the dialogue of the bill, the expectation was that 100 percent of all American public school students would achieve "proficiency" by the year of 2014. Even in the highest-ranked nations in schooling have not been capable of achieving 100 percent "proficiency," so this expectation of the United States was incredibly unprecedented, and also unclear because it did not provide one definition for "proficient" (Rosenberg, 2004).

Teacher Autonomy

Autonomy in the classroom has been on a decrease since the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 because of the standardized testing mandates (Yaffe et. al., 2008). These mandates restricted curriculum and the power that teachers held over the design because of the need to educate their students on the content of the tests so that they would do well. We see an even further decline in 2009 when the Common Core Standards became more utilized and implemented across the country (Tampio, 2018). The Common Core describes in detail what students in grades K-12 should be taught and has displaced other productive and valuable ways of teaching and educating our youth (Tampio, 2018). Tampio (2018) states that this new method may be productive in raising the educational bar for some students, but overall the costs outweigh the benefits. Tampio also makes the statement that democracies should work to disperse the educational authority instead of having one philosophy around education controlled by one group.

The standards put into place by testing as well as by the Common Core have led to the idea referred to as "teaching for the test." The concept of this is centered around the focus of curriculum being on material that will be tested rather than relaying valuable information. "Widespread

reports of teaching to the test along with data that suggest that schools are losing their most vulnerable students suggest that schools may be more focused on producing higher test scores in order to look good than on making improvements in teaching and learning that result in authentically better schooling for all students" (Wheelock, 2003, p. 4). Finding ways to assess non-cognitive skills would be a productive way in measuring the development and improvement of alternate skills that students will need in order to succeed in college and the workplace instead of the memorization of facts (Yaffe et. al., 2008). The central idea found behind standardized tests is measuring the improvement of students, but behind that it is a measure of accountability for teachers. One must think, though, is this accurate since all students learn differently? "The bottom line is that only teachers can use assessment day to day to support the learning of their students" (Yaffe et. al., 2008, p. 5). After all, teachers are the ones spending the most time with their students, so they would be the ones most fit to find an accurate way to measure improvement and development.

Cultural Capital

A firm correlation between cultural capital and the educational outcomes of test takers has been identified amongst relevant research. Testing may be advertised as a useful mechanism for assessing knowledge, but it also may be reflective of a much broader and more complex social movement (Clayton, 2019). "After all, what is a standardized test but an assessment that refers to a specific standard? And that standard is white, upper class students" (Singer, 2019). It is among suburban and rural areas, higher performing public schools, and schools with a higher proportion of white students, that we are seeing larger percentages of students opting-out (Clayton, 2019).

Testing's procreating problems, such as students' lost creativity, curiosity, and the desire to learn are significant to burdening the greater student body (Swinson, 2018). It's a problematic assumption that students' test grades have become the representation of their school's funding, or the representation of their school district's learning level (Clayton, 2019). The fear of losing federal funding threatens superintendents from encouraging their students to consider their options otherwise, thus ignoring the opinions of schools or their students. And while the government is enforcing its powers in this manifestation of leverage, it is the education of low economic areas that suffer the most from this conflict (Levy, 2016, 56). This social dilemma is snowballing the issue of "heightened achievement gaps" between students' varying background of race, ethnicity and class differences. Because, let's be real, it is the low-income, higher diversified, urban neighborhoods that are affected most by testing's expectations (Yaffe et. al., 2008).

Testing retains the history of racial-bias inherent in the original intentions of first creators of standardized tests. Among test producers, the eugenicist foundations idealized that people of color have lower IQs, making the tests harder for students of color to pass. When mandated testing originated during a time of racial hostility within national politics, testing was thought of by these foundations as a way to further enhance the Jim Crow Laws (Singer, 2019). It is the No Child Left Behind law which supported this belief, and used it to championize the popularity of their tests. This, undoubtedly, contradicts the supported claims of what the law stands for, which is to "leave no child behind." Instead, the racial achievement gap promoted, and still does promote, a larger population of struggling students of color (Yaffe et. al., 2008).

The process of opting-out requires that parents are made aware of the possibility; but the unfortunate truth is that the majority of parents receiving this education about opt-out options are in suburban and predominantly white communities, thus creating an economic privilege among

the few (Clayton, 2019). Opting out has been a movement since 2014, and while there are parents who have been made aware of the movement since its fruition, not many have actually participated in it. Not because they are against the idea of opting out, but because testing industries have threatened that opted-out students would "compromise educational equality and fail to accurately evaluate teachers." Parents worry that they will be framed as bad parents for failing their children, or that their children will suffer academically by not participating in tests like the rest of their class peers. The common assumption has been to refrain from questioning the system any further, since these assumed risks sound too high (Levy, 2016, p. 58). Many feared that the removal of standardized tests would "compromise educational equality and fail to accurately evaluate teachers" (Levy, 2016, p. 58), however, there is growing evidence of alternate assessment tools that are laying these concerns of accountability to rest.

Accountability/Performance Expectations

In any educational setting, establishing standards of accountability can be beneficial to help ensure the best possible results. The concept is fairly simple; when a specific group performs at a high level they will be rewarded and when they perform at a low level they will be punished. In the 1990s, the states "established and defined the concept of accountability to set standards in learning" (Esposito, 2003, p. 2). This system was enacted with positive intentions, but the idea that thousands of unique schools across the country can be held to the same set of standards is not realistic. Additionally, it would prove to have severely negative impacts on the schools which would need more assistance in ensuring student success. Accountability can be an effective tool in an individual classroom but it is not as effective at a larger scale.

Throughout the United States, schools tend to be racially segregated due to factors such as housing segregation or socioeconomic status. The standard to which many schools are held

accountable refers to that of the "typical" student. In the eyes of test makers, the "typical student"

refers to the performance of the average white, middle to upper class individual (Singer, 2019).

When schools with less academic resources due to the socioeconomic conditions of the individuals

in the surrounding area are forced to administer tests which cater to a more prepared demographic,

it is obvious that they will not perform as well.

> "Also, not only are there inequities in the household incomes between schools, those differences are further exacerbated by the way we fund schools which typically results in less funding to the schools in low-income neighborhoods. Those schools, because they tend to be either heavily urban with older buildings or heavily rural with greater transportation costs, also are more expensive to run. Thus, the three economic factors, poorer families combined with poorer funded schools combined with higher costs to run the poorer schools in the poorer communities create a trifecta of inequality that the tests capture but do nothing to rectify. The schools are less to blame for the inequities than society as a whole" (DeMeulenaere, 05/08/21).

Also, it is important to consider that "students who opt out of testing tend to come from

districts and demographic groups associated with higher levels of performance" (Cremata, 2019,

3). So, students in these areas who may not perform as well are made aware of their option to opt

out so they don't have a negative impact on the overall results for that specific area.

Students should only be tested on knowledge which is relevant to what they have been

taught in school. To combat negative standards of accountability, "districts should consider

explicitly adjusting for the characteristics of the students who actually sit for tests" when creating

the tests by which they are measured (Cremata, 2019, p. 1). The success of an individual student

should not be significantly impacted by the performance of another student from a completely

different environment.

A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

My Personal Understanding

This study unravels how racially-segregated academic achievement has been created by American politics, thus perpetuating how students of color, and English Language Learners, have been strategically disadvantaged in the school systems. The basis of my formal theories find support in the ideologies of education professors Robert Green and Robert Griffore, together with that of the non-profit organization Citizens for Public Schools. Testing has been integrated so deeply within schooling expectations nationwide, so much, that I believe it requires us to be readily critical of this environment which we allow to feed our thoughts.

Racial segregation among schooling is a harm against minority students that is being perpetuated through mandated testing, in both national and local educational facets. The affects prove to be long-term and incredibly damaging for the lives that it negatively impacts. While white students are most likely to attend the higher-achieving and affluent schools, minority students are being concentrated into low-achieving, high-poverty schools. The test grades for white communities are inevitably correlating to higher passing grades than those of minority neighborhoods, which gives us reason to explore the deeper truths behind this trend.

Testing can be traced back to the late 1800s in American history for being used as a mechanism to establish white racial hierarchy over Black and Latinx communities. Scholar and historian Ibram X. Kendi claims that standardized tests are "the most effective racist weapon ever devised to objectively degrade Black minds and legally exclude their bodies" (Citizens for Public Schools, 2020, p 4). While this is true for communities of African American citizens, it has relevancy to all minority groups as well. The white supremacist belief that their ethnic knowledge is genetically

smarter than minority communities has been woven so deeply within American society, that the tests reflect and reward the dominant culture.

Dialect and language differences are being used against minority students through testing, which provides poor insight for the way that the system wishes to communicate their definition "success". Students are being challenged by a system that penalizes any culture-relation outside of white culture, which is a direct way of saying to students "Even though you live here, your culture doesn't matter as much, so either leave it behind or lose the opportunity to succeed. Your choice." Imagine how challenging this may be for students who inherently struggle to adapt, or have to grapple with themselves as being someone who is always less?

A study that was analyzing the development of black fourth graders found that when a mandated test was graded by a regular key, 46 per cent of the mistakes that were being made were directly linked to dialect difference (Griforre and Green, p 242). Griforre and Green agree that this idea of "content bias" requires minority children to answer questions that are inherently not written for them. According to another study, mentioned by Citizens for Public Schools, English Language Learning students were answering MCAS science questions incorrectly even when they had the relevant knowledge to answer them properly. Since 1998, ELL and Latinx students have been the highest percentage of student that have been the fastest-growing demographic, and yet they are the two groups most likely to fail the MCAST (Citizens for Public Schools, 2020, p 8). This presents an issue of testing, not the students themselves.

Testing's asserts white inferiority and historical marginalization of minority groups, which has created a racially-segregated academic achievement gap. *"What if we realized the best way to standardize a highly effective educational system is not by standardizing our tests but by*

standardizing our schools to encourage intellectual openness, [diversity], and difference?" (Ibram X. Kendi).

What is Racism in Terms of Policy?

It's important that I address what racism is in terms of policy practice and for testing, and how its intentions are creating racial inherence for students of color from the effects of MCAS tests.

 "When racist ideas resound, denials that those ideas are racist typically follow. When racist policies resound, denials that those policies are racist also follow" (Kendi, 2019, p 9).

We know that the MCAS is racist because its affects have created unequal outcomes for students that are of color - different outcomes from their white peers. But it is specifically by way of *institutional racism* that this is occurring. I believe this phenomenon is best described by African American author and antiracist activist, Ibram Kendi in his book *How to be an Antiracist*. He defines institutional racism as "acts by the total white community against the black community". The term was originally coined by Black Power activist Kwame Toure and political scientist Charles Hamilton in 1967 in their book *Black Power: The Politics of Liberation in America* (Kendi, 2019, p 220). I would argue, though, that this concept, when applied to testing, works against not only the black community, but against all communities of diversity.

"The construct of covert institutional racism opens American eyes to racism and, ironically, closes them, too. Separating the overt individual from the covert institutional veils the specific policy choices that cause racial inequities, policies made by specific people. Covering up the specific policies and policymakers, *we become unconscious to racist policymakers and policies as we lash out angrily at the abstract bogeyman of "the system"*" (Kendi, 2019, p 221).

While I do not expect education state board members to admit that their policies are inherently racist or have effects of racist harm, Kendi's statement here supports the ideology that the system is unjust and does have racial inequities. It just is not easily apparent to the eye. This racism has been strategically allowed through education policy because its outlined goals appear positive to the public eye, such as claiming to raise student success levels. But a policy's true intent seems to become clear to the public when the policy is in action and we reflect on the actual effects and of those that the policy effects. "All forms of racist are overt if our antiracist eyes are open to seeing racist policy in racial inequity" (Kendi, 2019, p 221).

I tried to better understand the Massachusetts state board's initiatives on testing by reviewing their laws written on the MCAS graduation requirement. Their laws state that all students seeking to obtain a high school diploma must meet the "Competency Determination Standard", which the Massachusetts Board of Education has specifically created for its students (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.). Under the subsections of the law, including the "Standards for Competency Determination", section 603 CMR 30.03, there is no clear definition provided of what defines "competency". While it is stated that the terms of competency are created and determined by the state board, it fails to address how the board decides *"what is passing?"*, *"what is not passing*?" or *"who, specifically, can pass?"* (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.).

Because the definition is supported on minimal grounds of explanation, how might we then rationalize that the MCAS exams are allowing institutional racism? I analyzed the list of members currently in office for the state board of education. The board is composed of a Chair member, Vice Chair member, Commissioner, Secretary of Education and eight other members; only two of

the members identify as persons of color (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.).

While the institution is predominantly white, including all of the board's leading roles, it is open for questioning why the board is lacking diversity. (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, n.d.). Reflecting on Kendi's model of thinking on institutional racism, my eyes are open to the importance of who is making these policies. Since classrooms range in diversity, it is a conflict that the individuals making decisions for the classrooms lack equal diversity.

I believe that if there were a more equally diverse board of education, its decisions would have a better reflection of the students who are impacted by the board's decisions. The MCAS tests' policy deserve to be gutted and re written by a more diversified state board, where the expectations of the tests are redefined so that all students, regardless of color or race, have an equal chance of succeeding. Regardless whether the board's policy intentions are racist or not, the fact that the tests are proving to have inherently racist affects is enough of a reason to establish new grounds for MCAS testing.

METHODS

Co-written by Sophia Poulin, Aidan Moffatt and Rebekah Etique

Methodological Stance

My, as well as my two partners, original methodologies for this thesis were situated in the idea of conducting a participatory action research project, or PAR. The three of us have experience in YPAR, youth participatory action research, thanks to a class that we took with Eric

DeMeulenaere at Clark University. The idea behind PAR is learning through action (Baum et. al., 2006). The idea behind conducting a PAR project was to allow our participants the opportunity to enact change that is meaningful to them in a way that is meaningful to them within their communities. As Baum, MacDougall, and Smith stated,

> "Firstly, it focuses on research whose purpose is to enable action… Secondly, PAR pays careful attention to power relationships, advocating for power to be deliberately shared between the researcher and the researched: blurring the line between them until the researched become the researchers… Thirdly, PAR contrasts with less dynamic approaches that remove data and information from their contexts" (Baum et. al., 2006).

Our initial goal was to adopt this practice and empower our participants to lead us in a direction that they saw as important-within the realm of high stakes standardized testing- while we assisted them, collected data, and formed our theses. Unfortunately, the Covid-19 pandemic required us to shift our methodology into one that we were able to conduct while following the health guidelines that were brought on by the pandemic.

With the pandemic, we switched to a qualitative method relying on interviews in order to collect our data. Our goal was to collect data from willing participants that we could then distribute to the public concerning high stakes standardized testing. My partners and I chose this form of research because, as Fontana and Frey stated, "…with the assumption that interviewing results in true and accurate pictures of respondents' selves and lives" (Fontana & Frey, 2005), if we were not able to study our participants as they worked- like we planned with PAR- then our hope was to collect accurate data that gave a good representation of how those that are impacted by high stakes standardized testing feel as well as what their experiences were like. The form of interviewing as a method of research exists as surveys, open-ended questioning, opinion-polling, structured interviewing and is most popular in the sociological field (Fontana & Frey, 2005). Our study uses open-ended questions as well as some structured interviewing. I say "some structured

interviewing" as the questions that we asked our participants were different depending on their title (professional, teacher, parent, or student), but participants within the same group were asked similar questions.

Epistemological Stance

I rationalized my understandings in this research by engaging in interviewing data collection. Interviewing people entails verbal dialogue, which is the most effective way that I learn since I find a value in the experiences of others and their personal opinions. There is always something to be learned there. I realize that everyone's background is different - some significantly different from others. It is for these differences that people have the ability to interpret topics contrary from one another, and we can always learn just by listening to an interpretation different from our own.

My epistemological stance is "interpretive"; as my interviewees have their own way of interpreting testing, they have the ability to challenge the way that I see testing's harms or affects. This is how I view the process of knowledge building, and because listening to the ideas of others is how I effectively learn, it was the most practical method for me to cultivate this thesis' data.

Positionality

As a student who experienced education among predominantly white-student bodies in homeschooling and private school before attending urban public schooling, I understand and am aware of the roles and responsibilities that surround being critical of the school system's treatment of students of color. In this, I lack understanding of what it is like to be a student of color who may be oppressed by the school system and how their experience of education varies from my own. I

wanted to further understand what that experience looks like on a personal level for POC and how their experience affects their overall learning trajectory.

My philosophical belief is largely that of a pragmatist. The nature of pragmatism is the belief that my own thoughts serve as an instrument for action and problem-solving. I believe that without pragmatic thinking, we have the possibility to evolve into an unequal system - whether that be inequality between people of differing social, racial, gendered or ethnic class.

I have allowed it to become my personal responsibility to ensure equality between all students because of the experiences I shared as a student in an urban public school. It opened my eyes to the apparent separation of student success between students of varying races or ethnicities. A flaw to my views is that I sometimes allow my emotions, usually of frustration, to override the practicality of forming realistic solutions. It was in my best interests to avoid this flaw from engaging in this thesis. I hope the results of this study will shed light on the unequal educational problems that exist among urban, working class, and diverse communities.

Participants

The participants in our study were parents and guardians of students, educators, and professionals that work(ed) within the realm of standardized testing. They comprised a diverse cohort of individuals who represented several races, levels of education, and experiences within education – different from my own. It was important to me, as the researcher, that it was included of their opinions and information from a diverse group in order to ensure unbiased data. My positionality had a unique impact on the collection of data due to the variation in our participants. For example, the conversations which were held with education professionals took on a more assertive role.

All participants involved in the interview process identified as Caucasian, English-speaking, Massachusetts residents and ranging in age groups from 20s to 60s. Participants included a journalist, a suburban mother, a special education director, a Clark University education board member and Worcester teachers. We included participants who have personally opted their children out of testing, individuals who prepare students for testing, individuals who have operated movements and rallies against testing, and individuals who have been involved in producing testing.

Data Collection

Our data collection method involved individual interviews with teachers and education professionals through audio-recorded Zoom video chats. Interviewee's input was used as transcribed data, which allowed my research partners and I to link our ideas of testing to those of individuals personally affected by testing. Our qualitative effectiveness provided a realistic approach, as we ensured questioning of individuals in support of testing as well as individuals opposed to testing.

The questions we asked varied depending on the background of our participants. Commonly shared questions which we asked all participants, regardless of background, were "What would you like to see changed about standardized tests?", "Do you find it to be fair that generalized testing is expected of all student? Why or why not?", and "What assumptions did you have of testing before being exposed to testing, and what did you realize after being exposed to testing?" We included personalized questions for each participant based on their career or involvement with testing.

The protocol for how we conducted all of our interviews remained consistent, including length of time for interviewing, introduction of our research team, and nonbiased questioning. We ensured that our number of questions planned for each interview were limited to allow the interviewees an appropriate amount of time to talk.

Data Analysis

I understood that racial bias has been embedded within testing material. To highlight this as accuracy, I used the data which we collected through our interviews to clearly identify the harms that 1) prove that racial bias is occurring within testing, and 2) that there are inherent inequalities for linguistically and culturally diverse students. I questioned interviewees on their knowledge of standardized test risks, as well as minoritized student affects. The parental responses personalized the proven harms and our educational professional's responses solidified the truths of testing harm towards students of color, particularly.

FINDINGS

Partially Co-Written with Sophia Poulin and Aidan Moffatt

Shared Concerns

Throughout our research, we attempted to answer the following questions: (1) Why isn't the opt-out option more well-known? (2) What would be the parental feedback if they were to be educated on the proven harms of testing? (3) If parents did receive this educational understanding of testing's negative harms, would they be more likely to opt their children out of testing, or would they resume the normalcy? In constructing these questions, as well as creating our Praxis project,

us three researchers came together to address a common interest: standardized testing. Through our experiences within the Worcester Public Schools, as well as our own educational experiences, we have seen how standardized tests is detrimental and counterintuitive to the success of students. The concepts that we built from are the works of FairTest and Citizens for Public Schools. Through speaking with representatives of these organizations as well as browsing the resources displayed on their websites, we crafted our Praxis project. These organizations work to limit, and hopefully terminate, the use of standardized testing. By referencing their resources and referring back to their work, we were able to come up with our one semester project that addresses the opt-out option in Massachusetts. We interviewed various subject groups that were affected by standardized testing. We then took this information and relayed it through social media postings and a website.
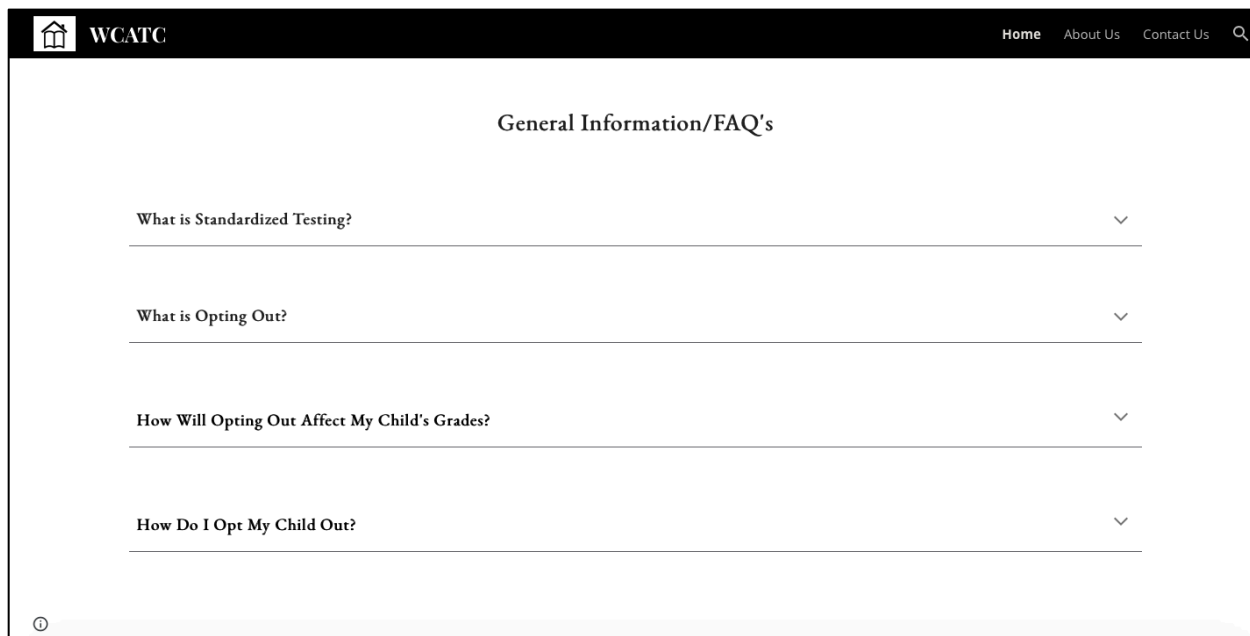

Our website provides informational content on the general questions about the opt-out process, making it easy to understand and easily accessible to interested parents.

Testing's Consequences

For our project, we sought to educate families on the availability to opt-out their children from high-stakes standardized testing. Among our collective concerns with high-stakes standardized tests were 1) teaching to the test, 2) the misunderstanding of the purpose of the tests, and 3) the lack of awareness of legal opt-out options. Through collaboration with organizations such as FairTest and Citizens for Public Schools, we have learned about the many ways they are detrimental to students. In addition to drawing on our own experiences with testing we also learned from the experiences of children in Worcester, Massachusetts. We also spoke with different representatives of anti-testing organizations and meticulously combed through the resources available on their websites in order to communicate what we have learned with families. We communicated these lessons by submitting an article for publication to a local Worcester paper. Our findings will continue to be virtually accessible to the public, allowing our research to be an ongoing informational outlet for parents, students and educators.

Our team wanted to gather the opinions and stories of parents, teachers, and education workers with a range of experiences involved with education and standardized testing. Many of these interviewees had strong opinions on standardized and high stakes tests based on initiatives to remove them, discredit them, and/or opt-out of them. Specifically, we wanted to gather more information on the general perception of the opt-out movement and how it has played out in schools and communities. Our primary focus regarding the concept of opting-out was in relation to the MCAS which is notorious for its high stakes aspect and excessive time consumption, not only during the administration of the test, but also the many days, weeks and months that teachers often focus on preparing their students for these tests. We found that the lack of awareness of the MCAS opt-out movement is primarily attributed to a lack of information on the topic. Based on

the interviews and other research, we created a hub of social media resources for parents to use as a guide for opting-out. In addition to explaining the process, these resources contain facts and information which highlight the potential consequences of standardized and high stakes testing.
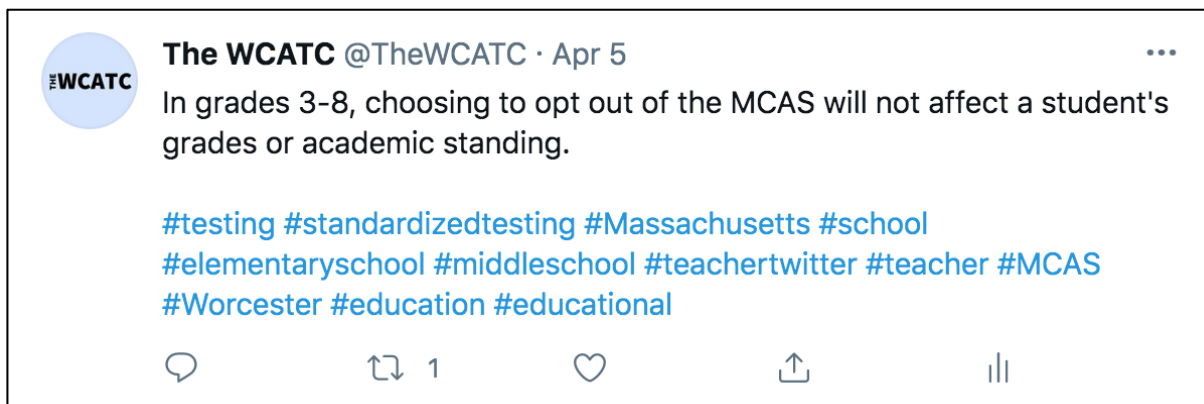
A tweet that can be found on our social media source, @TheWCATC.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the process of our praxis research was heavily impacted by the unprecedented social effects of the national health crisis. The Theory of Change to this group thesis had the original intent of educating parents of the opt-out process of standardized testing through in-person meetings. However, state-mandated health restrictions withheld our ability to conduct in-person meetings and caused us to rearrange our process for both the gathering and dissemination of our data. With these restrictions, we decided to switch to a podcast model in order to conduct our research. The opportunity for our project to gather and share information through a series of podcast interviews was planned but was subsequently rejected by our university's Institutional Review Committee, indicating that we would have to protect expert's privacy rights. This led us to ultimately turn to the project we finally implemented. These repeated modifications both delayed the time we had to disseminate the information and the ability for it to reach broader audiences. Nevertheless, with the privilege of interviewing educators and parents on their knowledge and experiences with educational testing and opt-out of testing, we succeeded

in creating a social media network to serve as an educational platform for distributing useful knowledge for educators, students, and families on the dangers of standardized testing and the process for opting out. And those resources will continue to exist even though our project is not complete, so that we hope it will continue to reach people.

The Different Lenses of Cultural Bias

Cultural Bias: The Political Initiative

Testing industries are making large profits in the sales of testing, and while students have no choice but to take the exams to complete school, they are forced to comply with the rising prices. Likewise, testing's expectations of "passing grades" are growingly unrealistic.

These are the issues which are most common when we discuss the flaws of testing at parent-teacher nights or among our friends. But there is a conflict being embedded into the fabrics of testing that is simply being ignored: racial exclusion. I originally assumed that town district economics were the main instigators for creating vast differences in achievement between students of color and their white peers. But in fact, it is the politics that are controlling those segregating lines of achievement, which I will refer to as achievement gaps.

I began cultivating this new theory of understanding on test production's initiatives by interviewing a local journalist. Her previous experience as a state education board member expanded my insight on the raw and original intentions of test makers. It also expanded my view of politics' leverage on the 'popcorn success' in classrooms. I asked the interviewee of the importance that equitable resources could provide to students' learning, but she seemed to interpret my question as an issue of English language and fluency comprehension instead. She never did

answer my question in regard to equitability but rather more emphasized how one's fluency can determine the end-all-be-all career success of an individual (RS, 02/16/2021).

She also emphasized that students who pass the MCAS test are much more likely to be "successful American citizens". This could suggest a blind sighting-objective of the testing industry. If test producers assume perfect scoring on the MCAS, they must have some outline to their own definition of what a "successful citizen" is, and what it takes to achieve that expectation. Testing tends to "flunk" students of diversity with the industry's personal definition of "success" and "expectations" by promoting questions that are culturally inclusive to white cultural norms. I believe this phenomenon was supported by the interviewee's way of interpreting success as fluency. It is inevitable that students of color would be held back from the same possibility of success as their white peers if the expectation is focusing on their dialect, not their brain intellectuality or ability to asses a problem at hand. This objective of testing hinders success among urban and diversified communities, and the chances of these communities' success on testing is thus unrealistic.

At this point in my research I reflected on the American history of preventing African American success. I argue through my research that national mandated tests are a tool for enhancing the racial segregation of communities. Government's passed laws, such as the Jim Crow Laws and the Black Codes, were white Americans' way of legalizing segregation at a time when racism was blatantly expressed in society. In today's modernized society, forms of segregated marginalization are still being created but with more covert strategy and in more secrecy. And while education is the pathway for success, modernized politics have applied this racial targeting through political abuse of schooling – in particular – testing.

When the No Child Left Behind Act was ratified under the Bush administration in 2001, the promised goal was to improve educational performance and provide greater accountability for regional and racial inequality. The major conflict? Equality was emphasized and with little to no admittance for the need of equitability. The goal of the bill was written as to provide "equal proficiency", but the responsibility to define "proficiency" was left up to each state to decide, so it was actually impossible to ever accomplish equality from the bill, let alone equity. I refuse to believe that this foreshadowing effect was not thought of by the legislature as they were in the process of developing the bill. The gap between social classes were at an extreme at the time of the bill's passing, and accordingly, the educational opportunities among working class communities already lacked equitable resources to those of their middle- and high-class neighbors. Rather than "improve performance" across the boards as promised, the NCLBA deepened the educational resource disparities by permitting each state in the country to develop and to define their own achievement standards.

Standardized tests existed before the bill with the intent to track student's success, but the tests' purpose suddenly shifted to identifying schools that were failing according to students' performance rates. 90% of school closings between 2001 and now have been predominantly African American and low-income communities. The targeting market was and is, no doubt, our students of color. Judith Browne-Dianis, civil rights organization Advanced Project co-director, states the schools closing not as "isolated incidents but rather a movement toward privatization" (Rosales). More specifically, the privatization of white privileged individuals from their diversified neighbors.

Cultural Bias: Dialect and Language

The journalist I spoke with in my previous finding had served on the state board of education from 1996 to 2007, during the time of the NCLBA's introduction, and was titled Vice Chair of the board at the time that the NCLBA was enacted. I found this to be crucial to my research that I speak with someone who could share the bill's initial integration within schools, specifically from a government policy specialist's stance. State education boards were grappling with a new power, at this time, of defining their own achievement standards. This opened a great portal of power for the legislative agenda on schooling, without consideration of the teachers, school administrators, students or parents' opinion.

So I just had to ask… what were the test producers' expectations for People of Color ("POC") students who had proficient English-speaking skills but were performing poorly on the state tests. My interviewee denied that any students are affected by this, claiming that this was not a problem that existed within testing. The nation's current schooling system includes high diversity rates and with which continue to increase rapidly. This particular response concerned my thoughts for the students taking exams. Can the system really not see how students of color are being disadvantaged by them?

The interviewee agreed that most of us are mixing beyond the neighborhood where we live, but that this should not be a reason to stop establishing English as the dominant language (RS, 02/16/2021). She provided an example of two bilingual speakers who may be walking through your neighborhood, let's say, speaking Spanish freely amongst themselves. While English-speakers may not understand any of their discussion, the fact that their outside-language is being spoken in public in an *inherently English-dominated country* is considered to be a problem. This is the example she used when describing the views of the testing industry. Their goal might not be

directly to prevent other language use, but by emphasizing constant usage of English, it indirectly pushes out the opportunity for other language usage in the process. So, when a student of color sees a failing grade at the front of their test results, it is not because they are academically incapable. It's because the system has not yet been able to white-wash them to fit the white, Americanized model.

I suggest that the problem lies in testings' current inability to provide easier access in other primary-spoken languages. America is the fifth highest country in the world for having the most diverse linguistics (Ang, 2021). Our education system should be complementary to that statistic. It should provide more diverse-friendly material as classroom diversity continues to grow.

Cultural Bias: English-Language Learners

English-language learner students, otherwise referred to as "ELL", deserved particular focus in this research. Upon interviewing a tenth-grade math teacher, I began questioning the usefulness of testing her ELL students. What does she, what does the school, what does the public learn about students' math abilities if the only reason they cannot successful complete a math problems is because they do not know how to read the question in English. This teacher's school contains the highest percentage of ELL students within the district and caters to an open opportunity for eligible students to take their mandated exams in Spanish. But according to the interviewee,

> "It's still not helpful for a lot of them [ELL students] because it's still about getting those math concepts, and maybe they haven't been as exposed to them [concepts] before. Even though real-world problems are obviously important, I think that the tests should be math without words as much as possible. Just because it becomes so much more **biased** and challenging for groups if you do include all the words" (SC, 03/26/21).

I took notice to how the interviewee applied the term "biased" when referencing the use of the words on the math test. The test companies' expectations for white-cultural compliance is not just

undermining the ethnic value of ELL students, but also of their academic abilities. I must admit that by interviewing a teacher in this instance, it cannot provide a definitive answer of whether test makers are projecting these cultural compliances with intent or by subconsciousness.

It is my conclusive understanding that tests do not support all students' path for success since they fail to portray information that is linear to the lifestyles of all students taking them. How could any test or curriculum be capable of addressing content that is relatable to every individual student across the country? It is impossible to apply a realistic solution to testing in this regard, since it is inevitable to each student shares a different comprehension of cultural norms. If every student is to be fairly held to the same expectation, testers should promote equally relatable material that is accessible to *all* students regardless of race, ethnicity, religion or culture. My logic would have to claim that this is impossible, because no two students' familial lifestyles are the same. *How can you promote an exam which serves a purpose to provide "equal opportunity to succeed for all", and yet the test itself contains material that is inevitably impossible for all students to comprehend?* I strongly urge that standardized testing be relinquished from the school system entirely on this basis.

An educational professional interviewee among this research, in a separate interview, shared a great example of this phenomenon. He called it the "snow day dilemma".

> "A lot of the state standardized tests are written by people from middle income and up, and a lot of the essay questions and approaches are based upon experiences you might have in a suburban experience opposed to the urban experience. It puts our kids in Worcester at a disadvantage. One example from years ago that I know of… it was a long essay question "describe for us what would be a perfect snow day for you".
>
> And these people [principals and teachers] are all thinking about mom making hot chocolate, you're going skiing on the hill and having a snowball fight. But a snow day in Worcester might be no lunch and no breakfast. They might be forced to stay home or there's violence in the home or it's no heat at all and you're freezing. It's just a different perspective

to this that I think warp some of those judgments as well. Our Worcester students are from urban areas and all kids can do well on standardized testing" (JF, 04/19/21).

The "judgments" which he refers to are the assumptions that school administrators, teachers and test preparers may have that all students would respond to that answer similarly. This illustration portrays a relevance to how the "equal opportunity to succeed for all" motto of testing is selective of catering to its target audience - the students.
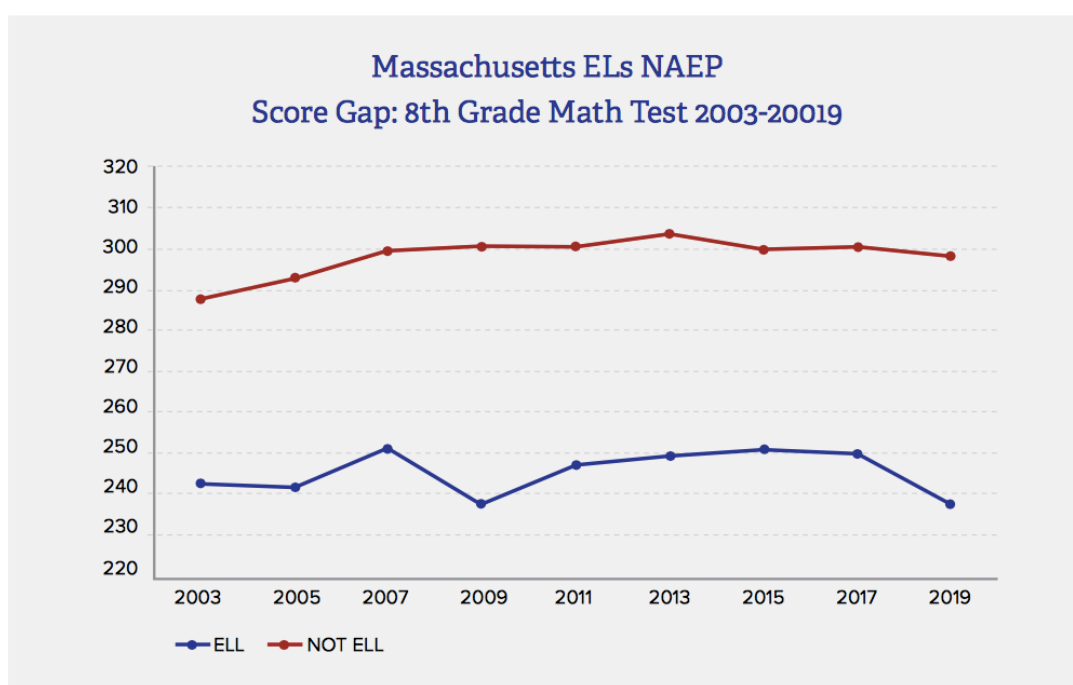
This graph, produced by Citizens for Public Schools, illustrates the significant score gaps between ELL students and that of their peers.

While students outside of ELL classrooms are statistically increasing in their performance, the graph above provides the evidence that ELL students are not increasing along with their peers. In math alone, their performance levels are decreasing rather than increasing, or remaining consistent across the charts. The academic achievement gap is growing larger as time moves forward and ELL students are being challenged with growing difficulty to succeed.

Cultural Bias: Harmful-Embedded Topics

I wanted to further my questioning on the effectiveness of the state's Bias Review Committee's ("BRC") efforts to equalize achievement opportunities for all test takers. It is a typical regiment for most standardized testing industries to gather a collection of relevant educators who may discern over the appropriateness of the material presented on the released exams. The Massachusetts Department of Education website provides that having this committee "ensures that no questions appearing on the tests may potentially disadvantage particular groups of students taking the test and no questions will likely favor one group of students taking the test over another group of students for non-educationally relevant reasons" (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2020). After gathering this information, I interrogated the truth of this claim in one of our interviews with a local teacher.

> **Rebekah:** Despite language differences among students, would you say that the prompted questions ever share cultural bias?
>
> **Interviewee:** Two years ago, the Board put a question on the English MCAS open response that ended up getting discounted because of pushback. The students had to read a passage which was pro-slavery from the point of view of a slave owner and they had to write from the perspective of that person. There was legitimately a lot of pushback about that being insensitive and affecting students.…I also heard with the English [exam], there was a question about milk coming from cows. A lot of students in urban districts got it wrong because they legitimately didn't know that milk came from cows (SC, 03/26/21).

I located articles in support of both the English prompts that our interviewee mentioned. The MCAS test developers of the "pro slavery" prompt had used a supporting text from *The Underground Railroad* by Colson Whitehead, a raw historical written piece. The prompt had originally been implemented in 2017 and tested on more than 1,000 students as a field test question, and later found full approval by the BRC as a test item for 2019. While the committee's opinion

of this to be a positively challenging question, students expressed feelings of discomfort between using racist language to articulate their test response or sacrifice the historical accuracy implied. The Massachusetts Teachers Association agreed that the question had potential of being particularly traumatic for African American students involved in the test-taking. The author of *The Underground Railroad* learned of how his raw material was used by the MCAS to encourage students to embody the lifestyle of a slave owner and he did not receive this news very well. He made the following statement to news media:

> "Inhabiting characters like Ethel caused me great emotional distress. I can only imagine how painful it was for the students to find this insensitive assignment on their high stakes test. I salute their courage. Whoever came up with the question has done a great disservice to these kids, and everyone who signed off on it should be ashamed" (CBS Broadcasting Inc., 2019).

I focus on this example not because it is one sample of negligence by the committee, but it is merely one of a numerous amount of cultural biases in our country's testing system. While a group more than 1,000 students had taken the prompt without questioning it, you must ask… *why didn't they?* The industry has developed a power that has the full ability to control a student's educational future. The industry knows this, so do we. This specific prompt also questions the ideals supported by the testing industry. Because the lack of pushback during the stages of field testing, it was leaning on this fact that the BRC did not hesitate to pass this material along to the larger test. This story undermines any confidence we might have in knowing a Bias Review Committee exists to review test questions.

CONCLUSION

Summary

My partners and I originally began questioning education's structural integrity from an early stage in our collegiate career, as our shared curriculum held a great interest for the topic.

Clark University's well-cherished Dr. Ameer inspired me to critically interrogate the nature of our public education system. This included his meaningful provision for dialogue on standardized testing and its effect on students' learning, which laid the foundation for this praxis research project. It began with questioning the specific student effects of testing, which led to a more complex inquiry into our local school systems. As we continued to link case by case scenarios between local urbanized students and this growing testing requirement, we decided it would be best to focus our project towards removing the use of mandated high stakes standardized testing.

As we challenged the ideas of the testing industry's effects on students through our interview sessions my theoretical framework transformed. The term "bias" was mentioned by every interviewee we spoke with, which encouraged my focus to be in cultural bias, specifically.

Based on the factual and statistical evidence in this research, provided by the No Child Left Behind Act, I find the effects of mandated testing to be inherently racist against students of color. The American political interference on schools, which was created by passing the NCLB Act, has allowed effects of racial bias within mandated testing's content. Testing currently fails to provide a more diverse-friendly material to meet the needs of diversity growth among classrooms. English Language Learning students are not receiving equitable assistance to their fluent, English-speaking peers, which is preventing ELL students of the ability to score the same grades as their peers. Lastly, harmful and racially sensitive materials are being permitted in the standardized tests. These issues, combined, are a recipe for disaster for students of color who must take the required MCAS exams in order to graduate high school.

I believe that for us to achieve the removal of such a large institutional agenda, it would require a mass movement of parents opting their children out of the MCAS exam. When testing scores fall below the exam's "passing" grades, schools fall short of receiving the federal assistance

that is offered to public schooling as a reward for success. If parents within one school, or district, were encouraged to opt their children out of testing and demand their local government for funding assistance, I have an assumed expectation that local areas will hear of these actions and consider opting out with the same demands as well.

A movement this specific will require teachers and school administrators to risk their occupations in order to rally parents in educating, encouraging and leading them to bring about this change. Like any activist work, or as any huge institutional change comes to be, it will require sacrifice, time and consistency to wake the attention of Massachusetts' state school board. Parents resisting for their children to take the exam in large numbers may have initial harmful effects for students if school boards are not convinced so easily. But there is hope in the value that opting out could have for students as we move forward, if the mandate of MCAS testing requirements were eliminated.

> "The story of our generation will be based on what we are willing to do. Are we willing to endure the grueling fight against racist power and policy? Are we willing to transform the antiracist power we gather within us to antiracist power in our society?" (Kendi, 2019, p 218).

Theoretical Implications

There are large consequences to neglecting a significant population of your target student audience if your material fails to represent their interests. "Interests" as in their learning expectations for themselves and their right as equally responsive and able-minded thinkers to cultivate knowledge. Between examples such as the "snow day" dilemma (6.3), the "pro slavery" prompt (6.3), and the test maker's marginalization made possible by the No Child Left Behind Act (6.1), they all assist in portraying testing's harms for students of color. The test material does not directly scream "WHITE STUDENTS ARE GUARANTEED MORE A'S!" but, indirectly (and

effectively), it communicates a message to students of color that their knowledge should not and cannot compare to those of their white peers. It communicates the idea of white dominant culture.

I believe the weight of expected dominant culture is why students of color are losing the desire to learn, losing their creativity and curiosity, and why many students choose to drop out of school (Swinson, 2018). Asking for help or building student-teacher relationships might feel hopeless for affected students, which disrupts the education process completely. This message seems to prevail throughout the education system, while not just within tests, but the tests are perhaps the most obvious way that culture bias can be seen embedded in the education system. The testing cultural bias penetrates every aspect of schooling. It is hopeful to see that subjects such as "equal racial acceptance" and "diversifying historic teachings" are surfacing in classroom discussions, but this is only the beginning of addressing the tip of the industry's iceberg.

Implications for Practice

My personal takeaway from this journey will forever hold effect on the way I view our national agenda. From the way segregated neighborhoods stand separate from one another and are reflected by race and culture, rather than knowledge and ability, I will continue to find it necessary to use my privilege as a white woman in this country to dismantle this racist structure. Even if that means impacting the life of one town, one family, or even one child. I have learned with great measure the importance of questioning higher authority, why it is that they make the decisions that they do, to not be shy of demanding more than what is being provided when it has proven not to be suitable.

I believe teachers can draw a lesson from this research as well; especially for teachers of white ethnicity or from predominantly English-speaking homes. They could develop a transparency of their school curriculum's cultural bias when teaching their lessons. While schools do not allow

teachers to choose the curriculum that they must teach, teachers can always choose how it is that they teach the material. I believe that teacher instruction would be enhanced if they understood my research, and by doing so, students of color could learn more effectively. Their lessons to students could be more transparent on topics of race, ethnicity, and language. Students of color would benefit by feeling acknowledged, and white students could develop an understanding of what white privilege is, and how to use it to uplift their diverse peers. This is a lesson that I believe all children should develop and this is how I define what the American model for learning should and could look like.

Limitations

I believe that interviewing a testing company would have rationalized some of my understanding in this research on testing's beliefs of cultural bias. I developed my own sense of understanding of cultural testing bias through conversations with educational professionals, concerned parents, and through the scholarly pieces which were provided in my Review of Literature (*refer to page 8*). But the opinions of a test producer would have provided an additional, critical evaluation on testing from a viewpoint that is contrast to my own, which I believe, could have rationalized some of the decisions that are made by testing industries. Perhaps by seeing the demographics of test producers and understanding the discussions that are made by their industry as they create new test material. Unfortunately, due to the timing of this thesis, the COVID-19 pandemic minimalized my research team's timeframe to conduct research, and we were unable to make communication with a large testing industry for questioning.

A second distinct limitation to this research was our inability to interview students who have taken standardized tests. My research panel was unable to conduct interviews with students

due to concerns of possible unprotection of a minor's identity. Additionally, this research was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, which complicated the process of contacting students since everything was virtual at the time. It would have been critical data to this research to include the opinions of testing's victims, the students themselves, because how they feel and think of the test matters. It is their current learning trajectory and it is their future that will have an impact by test results. For me particularly, it would have been beneficial to interview students of color who could personally interpret their experience of the testing, and for me to identify the similarities and differences between their responses, and those of white students' test experiences.

Significance

Understanding the education system is one aspect but understanding how to take ownership of your child's learning is another. Our current system demands for parents and students to become advocates for themselves. America's diversity across communities continues to grow, which gives us the responsibility to adapt our systems to ensure everyone has equal access.

> "A better system of **education** for the common people might preserve them long from such artificial inequalities as are prejudicial to society, by confounding the natural distinctions of right and wrong, virtue and vice."   - John Adams (Founding Father Quotes, 2020)

The ethical demand for educational fairness has stood since the beginning of our nation's history. Let us not fail our civic duty to ensure every child who has been placed in our responsibility's care is given access to equitable educational opportunity. Therefore, we need to continue to encourage parents to opt-out of testing for their children's sake, and to begin questioning all the academic curriculum that is being taught in classrooms.

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