

# THE RACIST WAR ON ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE

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In the Olympics, we know who the fastest runner is by who crosses the finish line first. But it is not that easy to determine who is the best ice skater or springboard diver: whoever gets the highest composite score from a team of judges wins. When it comes to academic achievement, we rely on test scores.

Like the skater and the diver, judging academic success will never be as easy as determining who the fastest runner is; the fact that the judges usually differ is testimony to this verity. No matter, few conclude that it would be better not to have judges decide who should get the gold, silver and bronze medals.

Unfortunately, there is no shortage of prominent educators, politicians and activists who want to kill testing. While they focus on standardized tests, they typically object to testing in general. They do so because time and time again, black students do the worst, followed by Hispanics. Instead of helping these students clear the bar, they want to jettison it.

It is a lie to say that “students of color” can’t do well in school. Asians do. Indeed, most white kids can’t compete with them, never mind black and Hispanic kids.

We have known since the Coleman Report on education in the 1960s (named after sociologist James S. Coleman) that it is not what happens in school that is the primary factor accounting for academic proficiency—it is what happens outside of school. To be exact, it is what happens in the home that counts the most.

We know that Asians spend more time doing homework than any other racial or ethnic group; blacks spend the least amount of time. This underscores Coleman's research. The reason for this condition is not hard to figure out: the typical Asian student comes from a two-parent home; the typical black student comes from a one-parent home. Kids raised in two-parent homes—including black kids—do better than kids raised in one-parent homes.

No state has declared war on school testing more than Oregon. It has suspended the graduation requirement for math, reading, and writing proficiency until the 2027-2028 academic year. It is doing so in the name of "equity."

Oregon never seems to learn. The previous governor, Kate Brown, initiated the war on testing after it was learned in 2017 that students were going backwards in reading, writing and math. As I noted in [\*The War on Virtue\*](#), it was reported that "roughly 60 percent of Oregon public school students fell short in mathematics as did 45 percent in reading and writing. It was the worst showing yet by Oregon schools, particularly in the language arts."

The movement to kill standardized tests is based on the assumption that the tests are racist. This is more of a political statement than a conclusion based on scientific evidence, but it is nonetheless endorsed by the National Education Association. This is also the position of Ibram X. Kendi, the guru of Critical Race Theory: he has made a fortune making the case against racism by advancing a racist agenda against white people.

Standardized tests are not infallible and are open to criticism. But to dismiss them altogether does not do anyone a favor, including black students. For example, SAT scores remain a key indicator of how well a student will do in college. And it is precisely because standardized tests are a helpful guide to assessing academic success that we know that

charter schools are of great benefit to minority students.

A Gallup poll published at the end of November found that black parents are very much in favor of testing, as are Hispanic parents. How else are they to know whether their child is succeeding or not? When asked how they would feel if they learned that their child received a B in math but was scoring below grade level on standardized tests, 72 percent of black parents said they would be extremely or very concerned about these results; for Hispanics the figure was 56 percent; for whites it was 52 percent.

To make matters worse, “equity education” in Oregon not only means a war on testing, it means a war on discipline. At the end of 2023, Portland Public Schools announced that teachers must work with disruptive students, taking into account their race; then they are to develop a “support plan,” eschewing punitive measures. What if the student engages in violence? He can be removed from the classroom but not the school. Mandatory suspensions are now banned.

This is madness. It is also racist. Racists make judgments about people based on their race, not their individual attributes. Lowering expectations for blacks is the most racist thing that white liberal educators have done to African Americans. It is also a recipe for failure.