

**THE IMPACT OF STANDARDIZED TESTING ON SCHOOL'S RESPONSES TO
COVID-19**

by

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**THE IMPACT OF STANDARDIZED TESTING ON SCHOOL'S RESPONSES TO
COVID-19**

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ABSTRACT

Standardized testing has a long and important history in the United States. For over two centuries, students have been assessed through testing and policy decisions have been made off of this data. However, this practice is not without its critics. Standardized testing is blamed with shifting the focus off of learning and onto testing (Ravitch, 2010), as well as turning education into a business venture with learning as a product to be measured and sold, rather than a life-long journey (Taubman, 2009). During the COVID-19 pandemic, despite the fact that much of the educational world was drastically altered primarily due to the shift to online learning, standardized testing and its requirements largely remained the same. There was a brief pause in federally mandated testing during the 2019-2020 school year (Field, 2021). However, testing was resumed the next academic year (Johnson, 2021). Standardized testing has permeated the decisions made at both the federal and local level of government to the extent that even in a pandemic, the federal government only pressed pause on administering tests; at the local level, assessment drove the timeline of schools' reopenings. This paper will examine, at a macro level, the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on federal standardized testing by the creation of several timelines of the COVID-19 pandemic and educational decisions made throughout. This information was garnered through digital searches of press releases and other newspaper articles concerning the actions of the World Health Organization, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Texas Education Agency. The timelines are then analyzed to examine how standardized testing has driven the conversation about schools during the COVID-19 pandemic and their future place in the education system.

The Impact of Standardized Testing on School's Responses to COVID-19

To say that standardized testing has become a problem in our school system would be an understatement. While testing started off with the best intentions to ensure equitable student advancement in schools (Gallagher, 2003), it has evolved to become the end-all-be-all of evaluating schools, teachers, and students (Ravitch, 2010). Standardized testing has shifted the focus off of learning and onto testing, leading to teachers spending an inordinate amount of time on test preparation. Its repercussions have also included the closure of several schools without considering their merit or improvement outside of test scores (Ravitch, 2010). Yet, in the time of the COVID-19 pandemic, the testing environment was shaken. Several universities dropped their ACT and SAT requirements as a prerequisite to students being admitted; the federally mandated testing requirement for the 2019-2020 academic year was suspended, and each state received a waiver to exempt them from this requirement (Field, 2021). However, this movement appears to have been largely reversed within one year of it taking place. States were required to resume federally mandated tests for the 2020-2021 school year, despite concern with the feasibility of testing students during that period (Johnson, 2021). This paper will examine, at a macro level, the impact the COVID-19 pandemic has had on federal standardized testing by examining how standardized testing has driven the conversation about schools during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The history of standardized testing in America over the past two centuries reveals much about the state of testing in the United States today. The tradition of testing students can be traced back to Horace Mann, the advocate for reforming American education through common schools in the mid-nineteenth century (Tyack & Cuban, 1995). Mann wished to move students away from the traditional oral tests to written achievement tests; he was successful in promoting written exams throughout the United States as a more fail-safe method of assessing students

compared to the sometimes subjective oral tests. Mann's ideas were supported by those of Charles Darwin and E. L. Thorndike, prominent scientists who highlighted the importance of studying individual differences through objective, scientifically measurable tests (Gallagher, 2003). In 1916, the Stanford-Binet Test of Intelligence was born out of the efforts of its original author, Albert Binet, and the man who revised it, Lewis Terman. While its original intent was to test for "feble-mindedness," it soon was introduced into schools to aid in educational placement and tracking. A test which could now be used on every student in school had emerged, ushering in the era of mass testing. World War I furthered this movement by utilizing a standardized test to evaluate soldiers' mental abilities in order to categorize them into positions that best reflected their scores. The success of the Army's program led to a rush on the part of educators to use testing in order to academically track students and sort them into different educational paths based on their assessed abilities. These tests, such as the Stanford Achievement Tests in 1923, began to grade not only students but schools on their ability to effectively instruct their students. In order to rank students and apply these rankings accordingly, the standardization of tests and protocols was implemented (Gallagher, 2003).

Despite being used widely in the nation at this time, tests of intelligence and achievement—used to demonstrate past learning and overall intelligence—could not provide needed information about predicted performance or specific intelligences. College admissions in particular desired tests that could show these qualities, and aptitude tests were created out of this need for colleges. This resulted in the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) in 1925, later renamed the Scholastic Assessment Test (Linn, 2001). More tests for identifying and recruiting students for college would follow this, such as the American College Test (ACT) in 1959. Much like in the era of World War I, the onset of the Cold War brought a new urgency to ensuring that students in

the United States were performing at the top level. Standardized tests began to be used with more frequency in order to determine where students should be placed and their future academic career path. It was in this competitive testing environment that the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) was passed in 1965, requiring schools to administer standardized tests and submit their results to qualify for federal funding in subsequent years. This began the use of large-scale testing tied to federal funding that characterizes much of the standardized testing movement now (Gallagher, 2003). Furthermore, in 1969, the federal government expanded the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) which used samples of student results in different subjects and states to determine how the nation as a whole was doing. During the 1960's, the civil rights movement shed new light on bias in standardized testing, which was detrimental to students in minority groups and lower socioeconomic classes. Yet this raised a dilemma; if standardized tests were eliminated completely, there would be no evidence of the poor performance of predominantly minority schools. The problem of inherent biases in testing has still not been solved and remains a topic of debate today, particularly in regards to college admissions testing (Unfair Bias in Standardized Testing, 2016). Moving into the 1970s regarding standardized testing history, however, there was an increased demand for educational accountability. The American government and its corporate sector viewed standardized tests as reliable indicators of a school's "bottom line," and test scores became schools' defense against losing students and funding. In 1974, Title 1 testing was restructured by Congress; expanding standardized testing in schools for program improvement was recommended. After this, progress toward goals and school funding were measured using standardized scores. By the 1980's, 33 states had mandated a form of minimum competency testing (Gallagher, 2003). The release of *A Nation at Risk* in 1983 only further fueled the creation of a test-centered environment in schools.

This report issued a dire warning for the future of the nation should education not improve, and heavily promoted increased state-wide testing, which many states acquiesced to. Several districts also realigned their financial and curriculum resources to provide for a more narrow focus on testing within their schools (Greer, 2018).

The 1990's saw more of the federal government stepping in to regulate testing in schools; Presidents George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton both pushed for developing more standardized tests to more accurately test the nation's students. As the 20th century drew to a close, the firm belief that testing was essential to ensuring that students and schools were performing to standards was firmly entrenched within the American educational sphere. It was only further cemented by President George W. Bush's landmark No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB). A bipartisan effort to assess students nationwide, NCLB calls for the annual testing of 3rd through 10th graders in reading, mathematics, and science. (Stotsky, 2016). It stipulates that content and performance standards in reading, math, and science will be assessed, as well as states' progress toward nationwide goals. States must ensure that all districts are reaching yearly progress in achievement; in contrast to the ESEA act, schools and school districts could be held accountable for their test scores. schools who do not meet the standards may face repercussions such as mandatory tutoring or school restructuring. At the time of its passage, the act was criticized for its lack of focus on learner-centered goals. NCLB's critics held that it would be more effective to raise the quality of learning through multiple assessment methods and a greater focus on the individual curricular needs of students in the classroom (Gallagher, 2003). Yet, 2015 saw the reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act, renamed the Every Student Succeeds Act. This act once again continued NCLB's testing mandate despite evidence that annual testing has not raised the scores of low-income students in reading and mathematics

(Stotsky, 2016). There has been growing criticism of the testing movement since its inception, especially concerning the previous example of lack of results despite the time and money spent on the movement. One of the earliest scholars to bring up the suspicion that standardized testing might lead to teaching to the test at the exclusion of other subjects was Dr. Kandel in 1936 (“Chapter 7: Continuing Criticism,” 2007). Numerous other critics such as Herman Aguinis, Steven Culpepper, and Charles Pierce have also spoken out against standardized testing’s bias and lack of usefulness in predicting students future abilities (Unfair Bias in Standardized Tests, 2016); Alfie Kohn is another educator who has warned against testing’s effects on narrowing the curriculum and segregating classrooms by ethnicity and ability (Watkins, 2012). Despite all of these concerns, however, standardized assessment has shown itself to be ensconced in the nation’s educational life.

Reviewing the two-century history of standardized testing within American schools, it comes at little surprise that a global pandemic did not drastically reduce the utilization of standardized testing in schools. While the spread of COVID-19 put the requirements stipulated by ESEA on pause for a year in 2019-2020, states were required to continue their regularly administered assessments the year after, despite many concerns about the safety and preparedness of schools and their students. Standardized testing appears to have become the only way that people both in and out of the education sphere know how to gauge the progress of schools and their students. As such, even during a pandemic, standardized testing was one of the foremost issues discussed regarding education, both in the public arena and academic arena. There continues to be wide discussion on both the history and impact of standardized testing on schools, as well as what it means in the era of COVID-19. These conversations lend themselves to an analysis of how the pandemic and assessment intersect and influence one another.

Literature Review

In connection with the history of standardized testing in the United States is the research and writing that has analyzed this history in the context of the changing landscape of education in the nation. Taubman (2009) examines the recent transformation education has undergone wherein corporate strategies and the business world have taken completely over the discourse of public education. This might seem like a reasonable idea at first—if education is one more “product” to be sold, than there is no sector better to improve it than that of business. However, the so-called “educational reforms,” have simply reduced teaching to a numbers game, most dramatically exemplified by the explosion of standardized testing. Schools and students were struggling and needed a clear “data-informed” indicator to obtain aid. Adding an assessment on school performance seemed a reasonable step in the system of education to ensure that those schools which needed help received it. It is not unreasonable to suggest that schools track levels of achievement and progress. Yet, with an overemphasis on levels of achievement, some schools are doomed to always look as though they are failing their mission of education. As John Hattie (2008) argues in “Visible Learning for Teachers,” schools with students who are struggling will perpetually look ineffective compared to schools with students who are regularly achieving above the norm (p.66). Yet, standardized testing is not often analyzed from the perspective of whether students made progress from where they began; rather, standardized testing has evolved into a tool to punish schools when they are not achieving results that are predetermined for a generalized population. In addition to this, the boom of standardized testing has led to lost instruction time on test preparation, as well as manipulation of scores. Furthermore, as Diane Ravitch (2010) argues in her book, “The Death and Life of the Great American School System,” schools that are experiencing difficulties will not improve if the focus continues to be on testing

reading and mathematics to the exclusion of all other subjects. Standardized testing has radically transformed the way we view knowledge. The success of education is viewed now as a product that must be measured against “standards set by the market” (Taubman, 2009, p.117) in order to know that the investment in education in the first place was sound. Ravitch (2010) advocates for appropriate assessments for schools—which should include more than just their test scores. As mentioned before, standardized testing evolved out of the need for data to show that certain schools were struggling. Since then, as these two books illustrate, it has morphed into a tool to punish schools. Many have called for standardized testing to be reworked; the COVID-19 pandemic seemed the ideal time to do so, with so much of the education world turned upside down. Yet, instead of using this time to break apart the mold of standardized testing, the U.S. Education Department simply pressed “pause” by waiving requirements for state accountability tests during the 2019-2020 school year. Moreover, the new Biden administration has affirmed that schools must resume testing in the spring of 2021. The U.S. Education Department is allowing flexibility within these tests, such as remote administration and shortened assessments, but the commitment to testing is still prevalent (Johnson, 2021). The resistance to changing up the status quo can be seen in the support garnered for standardized tests—which often includes many educators.

Why have so many educators have embraced this transformation in education? Taubman (2009) suggests the reason is due to the unrealistic expectations placed on teachers for being able to resolve social, political, and economic problems in the classroom—and the subsequent scapegoating when they are unable to do so. He further states that teachers’ desire of the status and respect given to other professions such as medicine, which has rigorous uniform standards, has led to the acceptance of the testing movement. This is the state of our education system

today; however, the outbreak of COVID-19 offers an interesting opportunity to examine the different avenues that testing could take in the nation.

In her article, “Remotely Proctored K-12 High Stakes Standardized Testing during COVID-19: Will it Last?” Michel (2020) explores the changing landscape of standardized testing due to the coronavirus. With the widespread closing of schools in spring 2020, standardized testing had to be conducted virtually or not at all—which became the case for federally mandated testing. However, other large-scale standardized tests, such as AP exams or the SAT, were shifted to an online format, raising many concerns and questions, the foremost being test security. There were also points raised about the varying reliable access to technology and suitable conditions for taking these tests remotely. Should testing remotely become more common-place, the article suggests several ways to ensure that it is comparable to testing in person.

The previous article demonstrates the changing landscape of schooling and standardized testing due to COVID-19. Perhaps the most comparable experience to this pandemic and its effect on schooling is the devastation caused by Hurricane Katrina. Yet after the destruction, the solution for remedying New Orleans’s schools put the local communities of color at a severe disadvantage. *Pedagogy, Policy, and the Privatized City: Stories of Dispossession and Defiance from New Orleans* by Kristen Buras (2010) describes the decentralization, takeover by charter schools, and firing of the majority of veteran teachers that came as a response to the hurricane. With regards to COVID-19, another situation that has exposed more clearly the “haves” and the “have-nots” in education, the same opportunities arise for the radical overhaul of public schools as seen after Hurricane Katrina. Buras (2020) concludes as much in her new article analyzing the racial inequities in the federal response to both Hurricane Katrina and now COVID-19. Much

like after the natural disaster, alternatives to traditional public school have been encouraged through programs like the “Rethink K-12 Education Models Grant,” which Betsy DeVos, Secretary of the Department of Education under the Trump administration put forward to give funds directly to families for virtual learning. Buras (2020) points out the same strategy used after Hurricane Katrina that advocates using the time of disruption of “normal” school practices to try new and usually non-public school approaches. However, the author states, the attempt at this after Hurricane Katrina to privatize the New Orleans school system has resulted in almost half of the charter schools being rated as failing as of 2020, 15 years after the natural disaster (Buras, 2020). She recommends that all testing be suspended during this time, as there are a myriad of challenges facing students who are able to attend school at all; the lack of resources to switch to online, distanced learning, especially in communities of color, will only further put students of those communities behind, much like after Hurricane Katrina (Buras, 2020).

However, the Department of Education has stressed the need for standardized testing in order for schools to know how far their students have fallen behind during this time, especially for those populations of students and schools not adequately equipped to handle the pandemic (DeVos, 2020). This step, while closer to the initial purpose of standardized testing—demonstrating which schools are struggling so they may receive aid—may ultimately turn into another opportunity to entrench standardized testing further in the system of education without taking its data to make real change for students. DeVos (2020) backed her decision to resume testing despite the ongoing pandemic by quoting a survey from the Data Quality campaign that stated over 75% of parents wanted summative assessments to resume for their students in 2021, as they wanted to know how schools and students were handling the pandemic academically (“National Poll Finds Parents and Teachers Want More Data,” 2020). The results are now in for

the 2021 testing cycle; however, as Gewertz (2021) states in her article, “State Test Results Are In. Are They Useless?” they must be interpreted with extreme caution before making any decisions based on the data. In addition to the normal changes of student population and staff from year to year, these tests were also assessing students who were receiving virtual instruction, most likely a widely different format than they were familiar with, and possibly even tested virtually, as was the case in several states. Furthermore, states were allowed to change the tests in a variety of ways, such as shortening their lengths or limiting the grade levels that were tested. Perhaps the factor with the most power over the reliability of the test results was the amount of students taking the assessments. With the Department of Education waiving the requirement that schools test 95% or more of their students, many schools likely did not feel the same pressure to hold their students accountable for showing up. The Center for Reinventing Public Education which tracked the participation in testing state by state show some rates as low as 10%, for instance, in New Mexico. Many parents may have chosen not to send their children to school for safety reasons, especially considering that the schools were reopening only for testing (Gewertz, 2021).

This is worth examining; while school buildings would be shuttered for many students for several months, they would be opened solely to test students. Was this even worth the effort considering the test results are not wholly indicative of how students are doing? Will teachers be able to appropriately plan instruction and governments provide funding with incomplete and skewed data? As the article states, these tests should be taken as a general overview; teachers will need to assess heavily in class in order to understand real-time how their students are faring academically. Standardized testing has permeated the decisions made at both the federal and local level of government to the extent that even in a pandemic, the federal government only

pressed pause on administering tests, and at the local level, it has driven the timeline of schools' reopenings. The section below examines the response to COVID-19, and in particular its interaction with education, at the federal level and a more local level with a case study concerning the state of Texas's response.

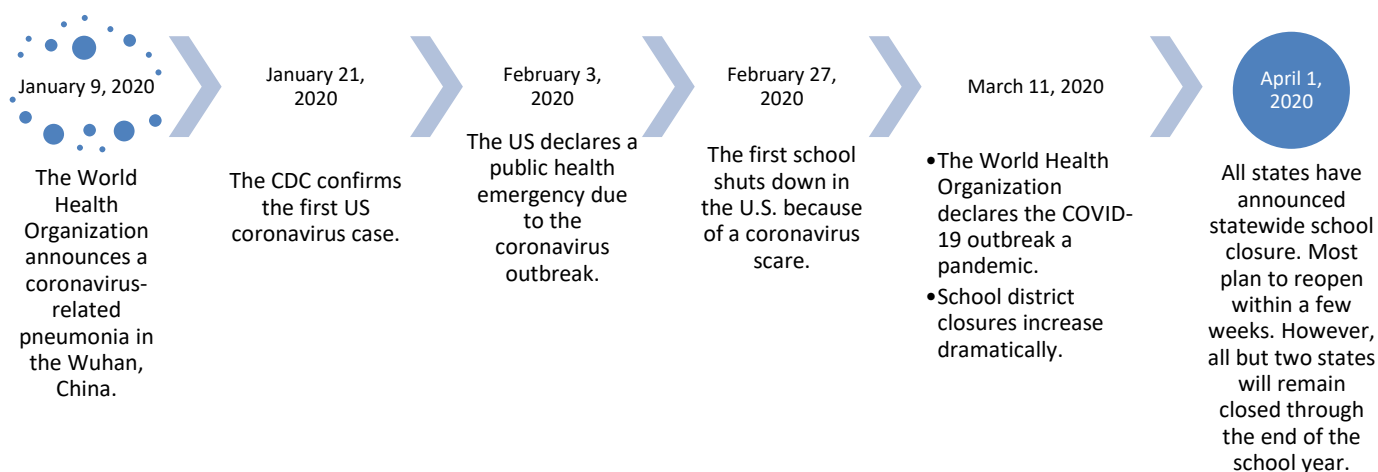
Methods

The information used below for the creation of several timelines of the COVID-19 pandemic and educational decisions made throughout was found through digital searches of press releases and other newspaper articles concerning the actions of the World Health Organization, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Texas Education Agency. Once the information was found, it was categorized by date and which level of government it was regarding—federal or state.

Findings

In order to more fully grasp the impact COVID-19 had on the U.S. education system and the world at large, a timeline has been created below to demonstrate the progression of decisions regarding education during each stage of the pandemic.

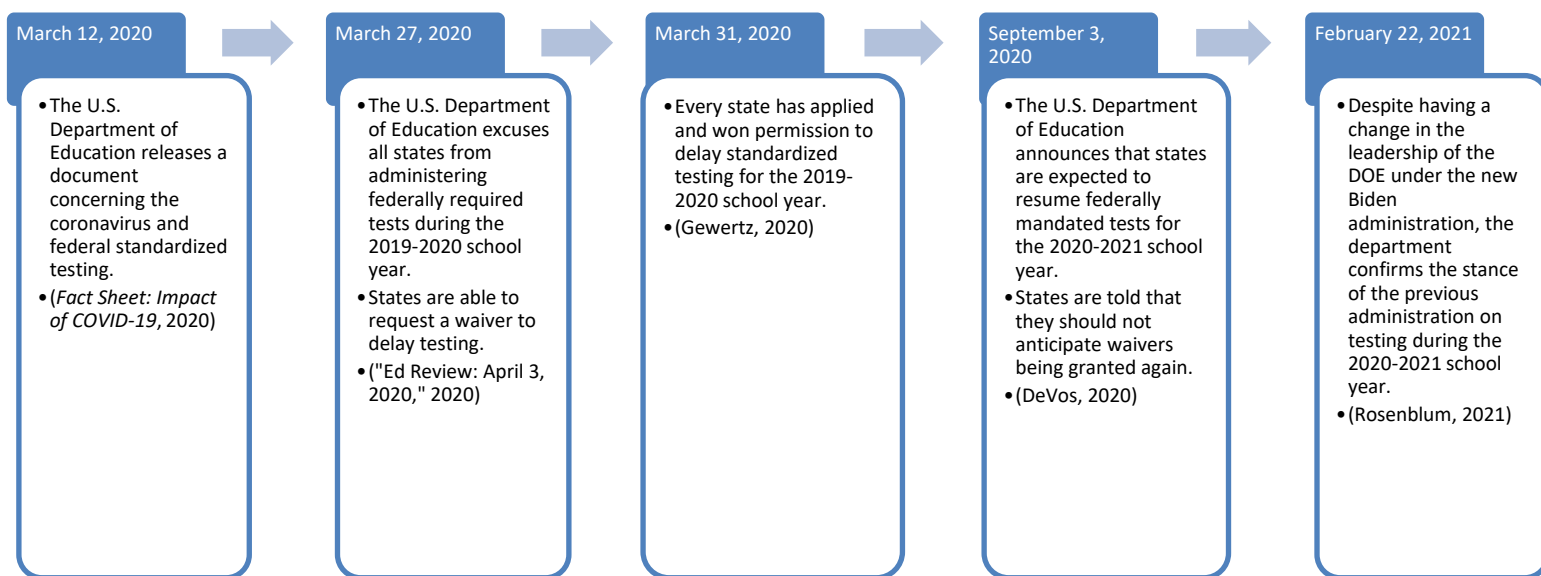
Stage 1: School Closures



In this first timeline, the progression of school closures is displayed in relation to the escalation of the pandemic in the United States. At the beginning of February, the United States declared the coronavirus outbreak to be a public health emergency; however, schools were still operating largely as normal, with a few focusing on more rigorous cleaning. Just two days before the first school shut down on February 27 because of a possible COVID-19 exposure, the CDC issued a warning for schools regarding the coronavirus, cautioning parents to be aware of their schools' plans for closing due to the outbreak ("The Coronavirus Spring," 2020). The beginning of March brought the first wave of distance learning; a district in the state of Washington announced they would begin online school for two weeks. Close to a week after this, the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus to be a pandemic. In response to this declaration, many school districts chose to close, leading to a spike in students attending school virtually in the days following the WHO's announcement. Ohio became the first state to close all schools throughout their borders on March 12. On March 13, two days after the labeling of the coronavirus as a pandemic, 15 other states have joined Ohio in declaring a statewide school closure. On March 17, Kansas became the first state to announce schools would not be reopening for the rest of the academic year ("The Coronavirus Spring," 2020); many states follow their declaration, while some, like Colorado, Illinois, and Massachusetts, extend their original closures but do not fully cancel the rest of the academic year. By April 1, every state had announced a statewide school closure. While many, as previously mentioned, had plans to reopen before the end of the school year, only two states—Montana and Wyoming—actually did so. The rest of the states eventually all shifted to distance learning for the remainder of the 2019-2020 academic year ("Schools Responses to the Coronavirus Pandemic," 2020).

During this time from January to May, the United States government was also responding to the state of the education system during the pandemic. While in previous years, federally mandated standardized tests would take place during these spring months, it seemed unreasonable to continue this timeline when most students were subject to distance learning. The timeline below demonstrates the federal government’s decisions regarding the education system during the 2019-2020 and 2020-2021 school years.

Stage 2: Federal Government Decisions



On March 12, 2020, just a day after the World Health Organization declared the coronavirus outbreak a pandemic, the United States Department of Education released a fact sheet concerning how the coronavirus would affect “Assessments and Accountability under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act” (ESEA). The document stated that the DOE would consider waiving the testing requirement for one year for schools impacted by extraordinary

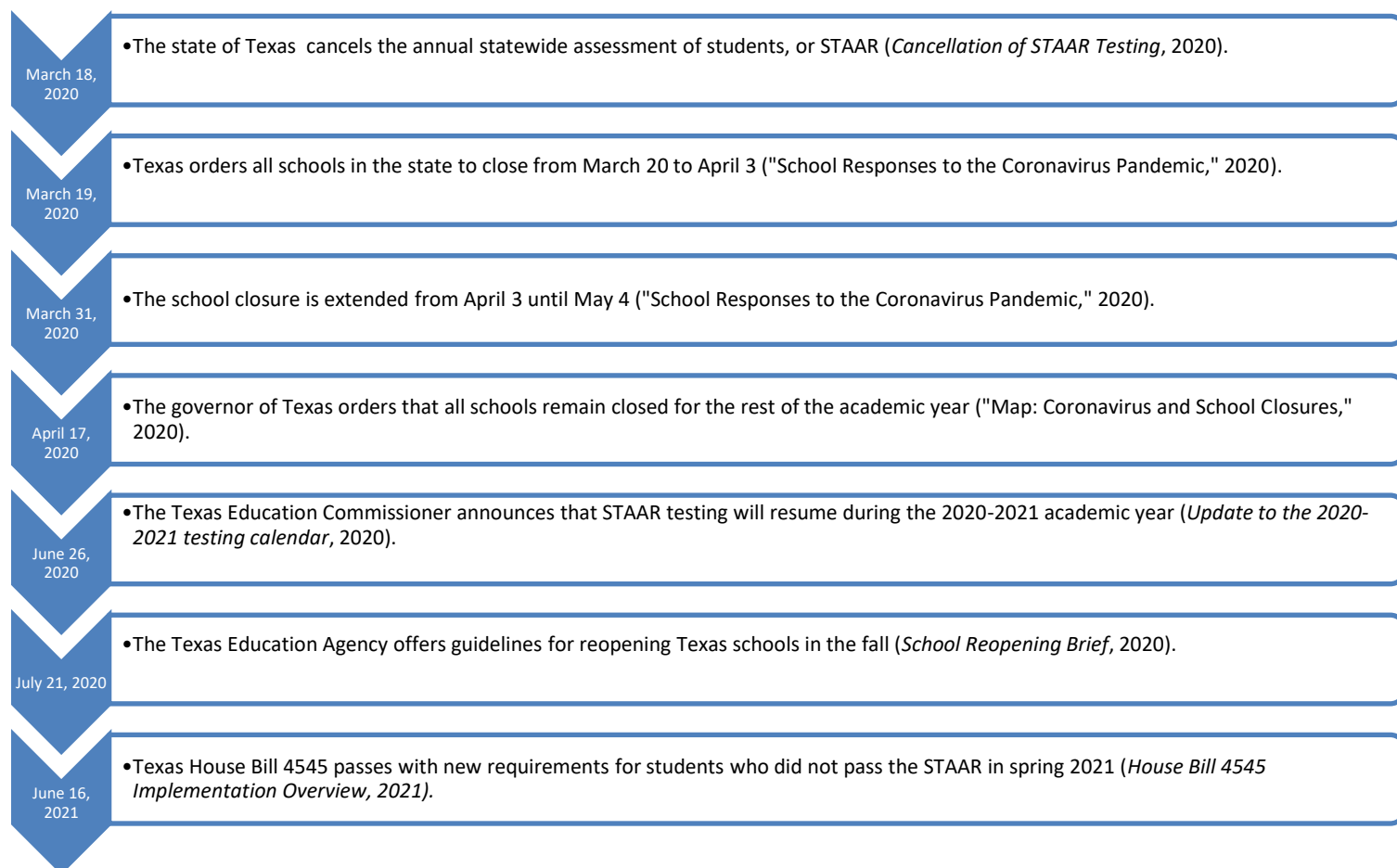
circumstances due to the pandemic. The fact sheet stressed the importance of assessments in providing information about students' mastery of a State's requirements, and indicated that States should look into adjusting the testing window should their schools close due to the pandemic (*Fact Sheet: Impact of COVID-19*, 2020). However, two weeks after this document, the Department of Education exempted all states from administering the federally required tests—as long as they applied for a waiver. The process to obtain a waiver became highly streamlined for ease of granting this permission, and within four days all 50 states had been granted the right to forgo testing due to the extenuating circumstances of the pandemic (“Ed Review: April 3, 2020,” 2020). As the 2020-2021 school year began, many states were unsure what the current status of federal standardized testing would be during the school year. However, early in September, the Department of Education under Betsey DeVos announced that states should not expect to receive waivers for delaying testing again. The policy letter released stated the foundation of statewide assessments—the ESSA—and reiterated how valuable these assessments can be to providing support for a child's progress. Furthermore, the letter states, parents are eager to know how school closures affected students. For these reasons, the DOE recognized that while the testing format might look different during 2020-2021 due to COVID-19, or even be more difficult to administer, it was of the utmost importance that the tests take place to ensure the continuation of “transparency and accountability” (DeVos, 2020).

During the second half of the 2020-2021 school year, there was a change in administration from the previous Trump administration to the Biden administration. The new Secretary of Education, Miguel Cardona, however, still confirmed that states must resume their federally mandated tests. Releasing a statement similar to that of the DOE underneath Betsey DeVos, Biden's administration reaffirmed the need for testing in general to ensure educational

equity and in specific during the time of pandemic, to reveal where schools and students were struggling (Rosenblum, 2021). However, the DOE stated during this policy letter in February, while schools could not exempt themselves from the entire test, they could apply for a waiver for the accountability and school identification requirements of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. With these waivers, schools would be permitted to not implement or report the results of their accountability system, and states would not be required to identify schools that needed differing levels aid and improvement. States would still be required to publicly display the number of students not assessed, as well as resume school identification in the fall of 2022. Recognizing the fact that the pandemic was ongoing, the DOE emphasized flexibility, expressing that states could use several different options to safely administer the tests, such as remote administration or even shortening the length of the tests overall (Rosenblum, 2021).

The third timeline is that of Texas's decisions during the pandemic; it is a zoomed-in look at what individual states were deciding as the pandemic hit, and once it began to recede, just before the new school year began in fall of 2021. It examines the decisions of this particular state before and after federal guidance, in order to provide a narrower look at the impact the federal decisions about standardized testing during a pandemic had on states.

Timeline for Texas Standardized Testing



On March 18, 2020, nine days before the federal statement regarding waiving testing requirements, Texas canceled its statewide assessment known as the STAAR (*Cancellation of STAAR Testing, 2020*). This decision came just prior to a school closure order that was originally slated to end on April 3; however, it was later extended to May 4 ("School Responses to the Coronavirus Pandemic," 2020). This extension is later shifted to an order on April 17, 2020 from Texas governor, Greg Abbott, that all schools be closed for the remainder of the academic year ("Map: Coronavirus and School Closures," 2020). During the academic summer break in June, the Texas Education Commissioner announced that STAAR testing will resume for the upcoming 2020-2021 school year; however, there would be extended windows of time for

testing, and fifth and eighth graders would not have to pass the test in order to be moved on to the next grade. According to Governor Abbott, schools would continue to receive “grades,” but they would be modified accordingly because of the pandemic. Parents and educators urged the governor at the time to cancel testing once again due to the unprecedented impact COVID-19 had on students’ learning (Swaby, 2020). While this decision was prior to the U.S. Department of Education’s official statement in September that states are expected to resume federally mandated tests during the 2020-2021 academic year, it happened just days after the Department of Education warned states to not expect waivers for testing during the 2020-2021 (Swaby, 2020). Later in July, the Texas Education Agency offered guidelines on reopening schools in the fall of 2020. Schools were allowed to temporarily limit on-campus instruction once the academic year began. However, they were required to transition into in-person learning after four weeks. On-campus instruction was required for every student whose parents wanted them to learn in-person. School funding and student attendance was also outlined as part of these directives (*School Reopening Brief*, 2020). A little less than one year later, Texas House Bill 4545 was passed. This Bill stipulates new requirements for students who did not pass the STAAR in 2021. Grade retention and retesting requirements are eliminated for grades 5 and 8, and students must have an Accelerated Learning Committee that will develop an individualized learning plan, including supplemental instruction, to help the student reach their targeted goals (*House Bill 4545 Implementation Overview*, 2021). As seen by this timeline, the state of Texas was often ahead of the federal government when it came to making decisions about the pandemic and education—the state canceled their yearly assessment before the federal government agreed to waive testing requirements for 2020. However, the state still followed the advice of the federal government once it was given, such as applying for an exemption waiver, and even chose to use

the data from the required standardized testing in the 2020-2021 academic year to make decisions for their students, despite the questionable reliability of the test results. This is possibly because of the closer proximity the state had to its schools and students; it was easier to obtain real-time numbers of what was happening in the state and what actions needed to be taken quickly in order to ensure the safety of students and their families.

Conclusion

Standardized testing has a long and important history in the United States; as much as it is hotly debated, these assessments have proven during the COVID-19 pandemic that they will not go away anytime soon. The timelines above demonstrate how many of the conversations revolving around school and students have to do with how they are being tested and what to do with those test results. At the federal and state level, there was a continued emphasis on testing because accountability has become the buzzword for schools. Funding for public education is tied to results on standardized tests in order to hold schools responsible for their performance; there was fear that if the tests did not continue, then neither would the money for schools. Reasonably, students and their families deserve to know their progress and that of their schools. However, the continued emphasis on testing by the stakeholders in government is tied to the need to show results from the investment of taxpayers' dollars (Taubman, 2009)—the need to be held accountable for progress being made in schools. In the midst of an uncertain time in America and its school system, the government fell back on what it had two centuries of experience with: testing. This was worrisome to parents who did not want to possibly expose their children in a school setting simply to take a test; it was also worrisome to those critics of standardized testing before the pandemic, such as Buras (2020) who feel that testing during a pandemic would not yield any constructive actions to help the most vulnerable students who will

need more support in school going forward, not another assessment to show that they are behind. Scott Marion, the executive director of the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment. Marion stated that making decisions off of the data received from these tests is more dangerous than no data at all, since the results will not be highly accurate to what students need. However, civil rights and disability advocates petitioned the Biden administration to not only test but utilize the results, as without them there would be no way to measure the increase in opportunity gaps during this time (Field, 2021). Both of these groups have experienced bias in education and view standardized testing as a way to show the quality of education being received. The data from these tests can be utilized to show differences in populations that should be obtaining similar results if resources were equal. Yet, it was not just those that have experienced unequitable treatment in education that pushed for testing during this time and going into the future—those that make the tests or provide test preparation materials were also highly invested in testing being continued. As long as the education industry is worth billions of dollars, Taubman (2009) summarizes, there will be more testing and not less, due to its profitability. And, as long as the testing is tied to the idea that it provides “accountability” and “legitimacy” to schools, this business will also continue to thrive as no one wants to be against either of those movements, especially when it comes to the highly important field of education.

It is a difficult balancing act between needing to know how the pandemic has affected students and not wanting to exacerbate these effects by adding a high-stakes test on the plate of students already suffering the mental tax of COVID-19 (Gewertz, 2021). For this reason, Gewertz (2021) recommends in her article analyzing the most recent round of State test results that these assessments not be used for anything other than general overviews of a student—unless they took the test under very similar conditions to 2019. If not, then assessments should

not be used to make detailed academic decisions about students. It follows that decisions should not be made about school ratings or closures either, with such unique data. It would aid in diminishing the nation's overreliance on standardized testing if the results from this most recent year were not used to make decisions on schools, teachers, and students but rather to take a snapshot of their academic progress currently. In this time, what would help students more than making decisions off of a test taken in unique circumstances would be a composite of information about their progress made up of their standardized score, plus information from other formative assignments or teachers (Gewertz, 2021). Instead of continuing to test students like "business as usual," states and districts should use more tailored formative and diagnostic assessments in the classroom that allow teachers prompt feedback about where their students are. In the future, the focus should be on creating a picture of the whole student and their progress, rather than a snapshot of how one student tested on a particular day. Measuring a student's growth using a variety of resources from both testing and the classroom would allow a clearer picture of exactly where a student is. It would cause schools to be held accountable for developing their pupils into well-rounded individuals, not just those that were successful at reviewing and taking a test, often at the expense of other learning (Ravitch, 2010). Some standardized tests, such as the STAAR used in Texas, offer data such as School Progress and Closing the Gaps; this would be helpful to see portrayed throughout the year with assessments, not just at the end of an academic year. Analyzing this data, but not attaching high stakes for teachers and low stakes for students taking the tests through making them more frequent diagnostics, would be beneficial in ascertaining the progress of students and schools. However, this data will also need to be interpreted carefully before decisions are made about school closures or ratings based off of the data. The COVID-19 pandemic offered the opportunity to put

on hold standardized testing for a year, and perhaps even evolve this system on the other side of the pandemic. However, assessment played a large role in decisions being made about education at the federal level, such as whether to grant states waivers to exempt them from testing or whether to open schools back up solely to test students, as seen in the 2020-2021 academic year. For now, standardized tests are here to stay. But with the possibility of the pandemic causing the reimagining of education for years to come, they should be lessened in their impact and combined with other holistic information about students in order to more accurately reflect the information schools and society needs about their success.

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