



THE PUBLICATION FOR FAMILIES IN SANTA CRUZ COUNTY

# GROWING UP

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# Your Letters and Thoughts

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## Square pegs, round holes

As a parent of three teenage children, one graduating high school this year and two others closely following, our family has been navigating the world of standardized testing - SATs, PSATs, ACTs, subject tests and more. I am glad to see some thoughtful research and attention being given to what the results of these test mean.

After my elder son's last planned SAT he expressed relief that the "testing" was over now. That started an interesting family discussion about how in many careers and jobs the testing will not be over. Standardized testing has always been part of an attempt to ensure a basic knowledge of, and proficiency in, the subject you are testing for. But how well do these tests reflect how we actually apply our knowledge to achieve a desired outcome?

Not so well it appears. We've known that in creating the tests we've erred in the past in creating a tool that did not clearly predict the skills and success depending on the population writing the test, and the population taking it, due to a number of biases, nuanced and not-so-nuanced issues

It's also clear that some of us are very good "test takers" while others, for multiple reasons, will perform poorly on these, while demonstrating exceptional ability in applying knowledge in real-life situations.

I am one of those people. Throughout my educational endeavors I have had to explain why my test scores did not match my grades, letters of recommendation, performance reviews, work experience and feedback. As a physician my job requires repeated certifications and necessary and valuable checks that I have the knowledge base I need to do the work I do.

In my work world there is a recognition that standardized testing and prior exam structures do not address the fact that although a base of knowledge is very important, how we are able to apply that knowledge, and use readily available resources, is more a prediction of our success and skill. My last recertification exam was dramatically different, essentially allowing an open book format to access electronic resources I use on a daily basis. This format redesign was a much better test of my skills, than prior exams, as was the intent with this redesign.

So, to my graduating high school senior I must say congratulations on your last SAT, BUT, you are likely to have many more standardized tests regardless of what you choose to pursue. Take them in stride and relegate them to the position they deserve. Although these tests in my opinion can be helpful in many ways, I am very glad to see a new attention and awareness of their limitations as well.

Very Sincerely,  
Beth Brennan

## There must be a more creative way to measure talent

I'm a mother of three. All three have gone through the SAT/ACT drill. As harsh as the connotation implies, I always felt like I was dropping off my kids at a mental torture chamber for almost four hours, when I brought them to their test centers. A timed chamber where their mental stamina would be slowly and painstakingly sapped out of them by the end of the session, supposedly measuring their intellectual capacities in the areas of math, English, reading, science and writing. Their scores will determine the hierarchy of colleges that would accept them. A redundant practice that never made sense to me.

In this day and age, surely educationists can come up with better and creative ways to measure a child's individual talents and skills?

Sahana Lakka

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