Example Counter Argument

While it is obvious that the arguments opposing standardized exams far outweigh any information in support of these tests, there are valid points to be made that do somewhat validate their existence. Student achievement, which is the primary focus of educators, was the driving force behind the NCLB Act in 2002, as the United States-a country that competes globally-fell far behind other industrial countries academically; as a result, new systems of testing were implemented across the country. Using the high-performing countries as models, the U.S. looked to, “China, a country with a long tradition of standardized testing, [as they] topped all countries in the international rankings for reading, math, and science in 2009 when it debuted on the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) charts” (“Education” 1). Clearly, students in China and other countries like Canada and Finland, are thriving; the question remains however: are the tests the catalysts to these high-levels of success? When examining these educational systems, one must look closely at other factors that contribute to student success: In Canada, the government spends significantly more money on education than they do in the U.S.; in China, parent involvement and time spent on task marry perfectly with strict study habits to improve success; in Finland, economic development and a focus on teacher responsibility has become the primary focus. None of the studies researched pinpoint exams as the leading, driving force behind the rapidly-increasing levels of success in these high-performing countries. And while there is no solid research disproving this inference, it is clear when reflecting upon the current educational system in the U.S. that the negative consequences of high-stakes tests are squelching any of the positives. To illustrate, in her article, “The Myths of Standardized Testing,” Valerie Strauss argues:

Standardized tests measure only a small portion of what makes education meaningful. According to late education researcher Gerald W. Bracey, PhD, qualities that standardized tests cannot measure include ‘creativity, critical thinking, resilience, motivation, persistence, curiosity, endurance, reliability, enthusiasm, empathy, self-awareness, self-discipline, leadership, civic-mindedness, courage, compassion, resourcefulness, sense of beauty, sense of wonder, honesty, [and] integrity.’ (1)

Since its inception in the United States, truly educating a child is not found in merely teaching to a test or promoting rote learning; education means so much more. It is the responsibility of all educators to teach students how to think critically, how to problem solve, how to be contributing members of society, and how to be leaders. While politicians may argue that without tests, there can be no way of knowing whether or not students are truly succeeding in the classroom, it is evident when looking through the lens and viewing a broken system that these tests are doing much more harm than good.