Sen. Sonia Chang-Diaz, Chair
Joint Committee on Education
State House Room, 111
Boston, MA 02133

Rep. Alice Hanlon Peisch, Chair
Joint Committee on Education
State House, Room 473G
Boston, MA 02133

Webster defines a Standardized Test as "a test whose reliability has been established by obtaining an average score of a significantly large number of individuals for use as a standard of comparison."

According to one definition, innovation is "something original and more effective and, as a consequence, new that 'breaks into' the market or society."

In 2015, employers are looking to hire people who are ready to create solutions that have not existed before. They are looking for innovators.

Standardized tests have ensured that schools sent students into society adequately ready for "standard comparison." But that work is not cutting it any more. It is simply not reflective of what they need.

I asked some professionals, outside of the education field, what they thought:

An Account Director at a well-known ad agency in San Francisco said:
"…I've never been terribly good at standardized testing. I'm a slow test-taker (and slow reader). I just recall… explaining my rationale for a word choice or a question to my tutor and she totally got my rationale, but of course my answer was wrong…"

A purchasing manager, software, in a recently named Forbes #1 most innovative company said:
"…the tests didn't give me a chance to exhibit my strengths. It would have been far more beneficial to me to study something like computer science…"

A purchasing manager for meetings and events, in a large, well-known company in California said:
"…I believe there can be better time spent gathering data on what day-to-day tasks look like for professionals…to increase their critical thinking skills, teamwork skills, analytical skills such as Excel, PowerPoint skills, etc."

The principal owner of a technology consulting firm in Massachusetts said:
"…'teaching to the test' does not lead to thinking…"

An admissions officer for an MBA program at a Pennsylvania university said:

"To be honest, all I can really remember about (standardized tests) is filling out all the many bubbles and the reading comprehension parts… I also remember feeling some degree of pressure whenever taking them since I knew they were important, although I never really grasped the full meaning."

Student learning is the goal of public education, correct? Studies show that students do not learn if they are anxious or upset. Standardized tests create anxiety for so many of our students.

An art teacher's blog posts from students in grades 10-12 in 2015 showed images of students responding to standardized tests. These images included multiple versions of tests acting as bullets to the head and a contradictory mobile of peace cranes made of standardized tests, one piece that literally stated, "This does not define you, stress, this won't determine your future." This is not surprising. Students come to my art class, after testing, looking and sounding defeated. Many middle school students spiral into misbehavior due to feelings of inadequacy brought on by testing. These students are intelligent. These tests place social constraints on their confidence and diminish their unique qualities that make them future innovators.

We have a responsibility to prepare our students for the real world. According to my collection of accounts, standardized tests aren't practice for the real world. We should be assessing student knowledge in a way that is reflective of the professional world they will be going into, like conducting interviews or assessing online interactions. Not standardized testing.

Katharine Kelley
Belmont Public Schools