

A Parent's Guide to Testing at Your Child's School

This guide was developed to help parents learn more about the different kinds of tests their children take during the school year.

The tests your child takes in school

Quizzes and exams that teachers routinely use to check on students' learning are the most common—and frequent—tests your child takes in school. In addition to classroom tests, your child may take one or more standardized achievement tests that schools are required to give each year. These tests, which provide a snapshot of what children know, are used to gauge how well schools educate students.

When your child takes an achievement test that the state requires, your child's performance is either compared with the performance of other students who take the test in the school district and the entire state, or measured against a set of state standards.

As a parent, you should receive information regularly about your child's performance on tests—the tests teachers use routinely in the classroom as well as state-required achievement tests.

Don't hesitate to ask questions like the following about the tests your child takes at school:

1. How does the material my child learns in class relate to what is covered on tests?
2. In what other ways does the school—and my child's teacher—measure how well my child is learning?
3. How much time does my child spend taking tests during the school year?
4. Does my child's performance on state-required achievement tests match his performance in the classroom? (If an achievement test is not well matched to what your child is being taught at school, he could score poorly on the achievement test while still making good grades.)
5. How does the school—and my child's teacher—use test results?

Your child and "high-stakes" tests

Some of the tests your child takes in school may be "high-stakes" tests. These are tests that school districts and schools use to make important decisions that affect your child's future, such as going on to the

next grade level or graduating from high school. School districts and schools also use test results to identify children who will receive special services or participate in special programs. Special education services and programs for gifted and talented students are two examples.

You should not be overly concerned if test results are used as one factor in making high-stakes decisions, but you should be very concerned if they are the only factor considered when making these decisions. Your child's report cards, his performance on routine classroom tests throughout the school year, and information your child's teacher can provide about his performance also should be taken into account.

Helping your child do well on tests

You can help your child do his or her best on tests by doing the following:

1. Make sure your child attends school every day so he can learn what is needed to do well in school—and to do well on tests.
2. Take an interest in your child's school work and in the results of the tests she takes in school.
3. Encourage your child to do his best on tests.
4. Provide a quiet place at home for your child to do homework assignments that reinforce what she is learning at school.
5. Work with your child at home as well as with his school and teacher to help him become a good reader. Good reading skills are important to success in school and to doing well on tests.
6. If your child's reading skills are lagging, or if she has limited interest in reading, talk to your child's teacher about ways to build reading skills and increase interest in reading.
7. Ask your child's teacher about the tests your child takes—classroom quizzes and tests as well as required achievement tests. Ask about the subjects, knowledge, and skills that are tested—and how the test results will be used to help your child be successful.

8. Don't judge your child's abilities—or let others judge your child's abilities—on the basis of his score on a single test. Any test provides limited information about what your child knows and is able to do.

A more complete picture of your child's learning

Tests are far from perfect measures of what your child has learned at school, or the quality of the school. At best, they only measure some of what he or she has learned. For this reason, tests are only one of the tools that teachers use to develop a complete picture of children's learning. A more complete picture of your child's learning also includes:

- The teacher's review of your child's daily work in class
- The teacher's observations of your child as he or she completes classroom assignments
- Conversations with you about how well your child is learning, and how the teacher can work with your child and with you to increase your child's school success.

Please remember that. . .

- You can, and should, ask your child's principal and teacher questions about the tests your child takes at school.
- You should receive clear and easy-to-understand information throughout the school year about your child's test performance.

- You can protect your child by ensuring that important decisions, such as promotion to the next grade level, are never based solely on a single test score.
- Test scores only provide a limited picture of what your child is learning. Your child's teacher can provide you with a more complete picture through report cards, notes sent home, or meetings with you.

Resources

National PTA: Helping Your Child Perform Well on Tests
http://www.pta.org/archive_article_details_1117835382718.html

U.S. Department of Education: **Helping Your Child with Test-Taking — Helping Your Child Succeed in School**

<http://www.ed.gov/parents/academic/help/succeed/part9.html>

Family Education: Eleven Tips to Help Your Child Prepare for Tests

<http://school.familyeducation.com/educational-testing/teaching-methods/37499.html>

Talking to Your Child's Teacher About Standardized Tests

<http://www.kidsource.com/kidsource/content2/talking.assessment.k12.4.html>



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