



TESTING AT YOUR CHILD'S SCHOOL

What you should know
and how you can help

There's no getting around it. Tests are nerve-wracking, for both kids and their parents. But they serve an important purpose—ensuring that your child is getting the education they need to succeed in school and in life.

Your child's role is to learn, study hard and do their best. Your role as a parent is to understand what type of tests your child is taking and why, how the results will be used and ways to help them do well and remain confident. You should also be mindful of how many tests your child is taking to ensure over-testing is not occurring in your school district.

As your child is tested on multiple subjects and skills throughout their K-12 education, keep in mind that love of learning is the ultimate measure of success. Encourage your child every step of the way. Push your child to excel while reminding them that they are more than just their test scores.

What type of tests will my child be taking?

At the classroom level

The most common tests your child will need to prepare for are the routine quizzes and exams that teachers administer in the classroom throughout the year. These assessments help teachers understand how students are progressing, so they can adjust instruction or support as needed. They vary widely from class to class and school to school. For example, quizzes or tests in music class might require students to play an instrument.



At the district and state levels

There are also standardized tests—assessments administered by the school district at specific points in your child's education, such as at the end of the school year or in certain grades, often third, fifth, eighth and eleventh-grade. These are often called "summative assessments," because they literally sum up what students have learned. While they vary by district and state, standardized tests are generally used to compare a student's performance to other students at the district, state and sometimes national level. In addition to providing a benchmark for student learning, they are used to assess how schools are performing overall as well.

Parents should receive regular information about their child's performance on classroom, district and state achievement tests.

Don't hesitate to ask the following questions:

- Q** How does the material my child learns in class relate to what is covered on different tests?
- Q** In what other ways does the school measure how well my child is learning, such as projects, music concerts?
- Q** How much time does my child spend taking tests during the school year and how many tests are there?
- Q** Does my child's performance on state achievement tests match their performance in the classroom? (Note: If an achievement test doesn't align well with what your child is being taught in the classroom, they could score poorly on the test even though their classroom grades are good.)
- Q** How does the school use the results from classroom and state achievement tests?
- Q** What help is available if my child is struggling with a specific test or test-taking in general? You have the right to request this information from your state and school district.



It's important to ask your school how the results of high-stakes tests will be used, as well as how your child is (or is not) being adequately prepared. High-stakes tests should never be the only factor used in making big decisions about your child's education. Schools should also take into account report cards, performance in routine classroom tests or projects throughout the year and feedback from teachers.

How can I help my child do well on tests?

- ✓ Make sure your child attends school each day and shows up for all classes.
- ✓ Provide a quiet place at home for studying, and take an interest in your child's homework.
- ✓ Make sure your child is well rested on school days—especially on the day of a test. Children who are tired are less able to pay attention in class or handle the demands of a test.
- ✓ Help your child to develop strong reading skills, which are critical to doing well on tests across all subjects. (See our brochure, "Developing Your Child's Reading Skills.")
- ✓ Encourage your child in all areas of their life. Praise them for things they do well. If your child feels good about themselves, they may do better in school. Children who are afraid of failing are more likely to become anxious and make mistakes.
- ✓ Meet with your child's teacher as often as possible to discuss their progress. Ask the teacher to suggest activities you can do at home to prepare for tests.
- ✓ Don't judge your child's abilities—or let others do so—based on a single test score. Any given test provides limited information about what your child knows and is able to do. And many things can influence how your child does on a test—from not feeling well that day to having been late to school because the bus got stuck.
- ✓ Help your child avoid test anxiety. Students with anxiety can become self-critical and lose confidence in their abilities. With any test, encourage your child to plan ahead, start studying well in advance and ask the teacher questions if they don't understand the material or what the test will cover.
- ✓ After a tough test, sit down with your child to review any areas where they had difficulty and why. This is especially important for classes in which material builds from one section to the next.



What are high-stakes tests?

When a test's results affect your child's future—such as their ability to move to the next grade level or graduate from high school—it is known as a high-stakes test. Usually, these are state-mandated, standardized tests.

Low-stakes tests generally carry less significant or formal consequences. A pop quiz or an exam on three chapters of a textbook, for example, are important but generally won't make or break your child's future.



Are tests the best indicator of how well my child is doing in school?

Tests are far from perfect measures of what your child has learned at school, or of the quality of the school. At best, they measure some of what they have learned.

For this reason, tests are only one of the tools that teachers use to develop a complete picture of children's learning. Teachers also assess work in class, including participation and completing assignments. They may share these assessments with you through in-person meetings, phone calls, emails or notes sent home. If they don't, get in touch with the teacher and ask for regular reports.

Make sure you communicate with your child's teacher, review report cards and ask your child regularly how they think they are doing. Let your child know that tests are important and they should always be prepared. But also make it clear that you recognize all of your child's different achievements and are proud of them in many ways.



Resources

"Top 10 Tips for Effective Test Taking":

FamilyEducation.com/School/Testing/Top-10-Tips-Effective-Test-Taking

"Ten Must-Know Facts About Educational Testing":

PTA.org/Programs/Content.cfm?ItemNumber=1724

NEA and Time to Learn:

nea.org/timetolearn

PTA Assessment Guides:

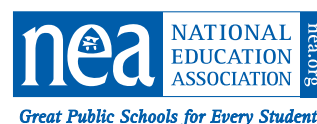
pta.org/assessmentguides

Other Resources

There is a range of other Parents' Guides to help you ensure your child thrives at school. Here are just a few examples:

- ✓ Preparing Your Child for School
- ✓ Raising Ready Readers
- ✓ Raising Scientifically Literate Children
- ✓ Helping Your Child with Today's Math

For these and other guides, visit NEA.org/Parents/NEAResources-Parents.html or pta.org/familyguides



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