

Helping Your Child Perform Well on Tests

By Ronald Dietel

Teachers, parents, and schools have a common goal and shared responsibility to have children perform well on tests. Tests are, after all, the primary means on which students and schools are measured.

There's been plenty of advice on preparing for tests: Eat a good breakfast, sleep well the night before, avoid careless mistakes, and answer easy questions first. Rather than focusing on these physical and strategic aspects of test-taking, parents and students are better off knowing that success in test-taking depends on good instruction, parent support, and hard work by students.

Here are some suggestions on what parents can do to help their children perform well on tests, especially in a high-stakes environment:

- Instill the value of learning in your child at an early age.
- Make sure your children are good readers.
- Communicate frequently with your child's teacher or teachers.
- Know your child's learning progress and needs by monitoring assignments, homework, and test performance.
- Establish a regular time for homework and studying.
- Don't make your child nervous about tests, even big ones.
- Encourage your child to develop a positive attitude toward school and testing.
- Review tests with your child after they are returned home for what your child did and didn't understand.
- Remember, tests and grading systems are not perfect.

Some test experts say that when their children were growing up, they emphasized the learning process. "I focused on helping my children find methods of studying and reviewing that worked for them," said Dan Koretz, a Harvard professor and testing researcher. "I pushed them [my children] to discern what level of studying generally produced a given grade, which was often more than they initially thought."

"Doing well on tests ultimately means knowing the test content," says Joan Herman, co-director of the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing at UCLA and author of several books on evaluation and assessment. "Getting good at format and knowing the tricks of test taking only take you so far if you don't know the relevant content and skills."

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