



Terra Nova 3: A Parent's Guide to Understanding Standardized Testing

Why Do Schools Test?

Schools test for several reasons, and with several different kinds of tests.

Teachers make and give tests to see if what they have been teaching has been learned, and if it is time to move on to something new. Teacher tests show which students are not keeping up and whether students have done their homework. Grades are often based in part on the results of teacher tests.

Some textbooks used in school contain tests to see if students are ready to go on to new materials, and to see what students already know about the subject. Textbook tests show if what was in the chapter was really learned, and give students practice in finding the main topics or skills presented in the chapter.

Other tests are given throughout our lives. We are tested for driving skills, for clerical skills, for college entrance readiness, etc. Publishers produce different kinds of tests, too...

Publishers' standardized achievement tests (also called norm-referenced tests) are given to measure students' progress compared to a national standard. That is, each student and each group of students is compared with the thousands of other students who took the same test under the same conditions. Another type of publisher's tests is the criterion-referenced test (sometimes called "curriculum-referenced tests"). These tests are given to see how well a particular student is doing in a specific skills, and do not compare that student with others.

Publishers' tests are designed to ensure the best educational experiences for every student. They are not traps and they have no trick questions. Think of them as weighing your child. The child steps on the scales and a number—the weight—is shown. You can then compare that number with charts that show ranges of weights for all children all over the country. Publishers' tests "weigh" your child's school progress.

Publishers' tests give a "snapshot" picture of each student's progress, giving the teacher and the parents a checkpoint in what skills and knowledge the student now has. Publisher's tests show where the child needs more help—what has not yet been learned—as well as what has not yet been taught. The tests show if what has been taught has been learned well enough to become a skill the child can demonstrate.

Publishers' tests help the teacher to keep track of each student's progress and of each student's needs for the immediate future.

How are Test Results Used?

Publishers' test results are NOT used by the school to give grades, nor to give punishments and rewards to students.

These test results ARE used to help teachers improve instruction in the classroom. They are used to show teachers which students need extra help, and in which particular areas.

Publishers' test results may also be used to help schools decide which students are eligible for special classes. Some government funds are provided to schools based on test results, particularly funds to help children with greater than usual learning needs. In some schools, funds for enrichment classes for mentally gifted children may also be given based on test results.

Publishers' test results are used to show the student's progress or his or her whole school life, not just one or two years. If a child moves to another school, even in another state, the record of that student's test results usually goes along. The new school can then see immediately which class best suits that child. (This is just one of the benefits of taking a nationally standardized test. All students are compared against the same standard.)

It is important to remember that standardized tests are only one measure of your child's progress. Teacher observation and class participation, for example, are equally important ways of keeping track of students' school progress.

How to Help Your Child-Before the Test:

Before the test...the best way to help your child is to be encouraging and supportive all year round, not just at testing time. Make sure your child attends school regularly, eats well-balanced meals, gets enough sleep, and completes all homework assignments.

Provide books and magazines for your child to read at home, and be interested in what the child has to say about them. Be generous with praise for the things your child does well. A child who feels good about himself or herself will always do better than a child who is afraid of failing. Encourage the sort of good work habits that are useful in test taking as well as in other work. These habits include following directions carefully, avoiding careless errors, and looking over their work.

Let your child know that you consider the test important, but try not to be too anxious. Be matter-of-fact about it; testing is a way of life. Don't lead your child to expect a reward for doing well, nor punishment for doing not so well.

Let your child know that the test is not a trap, but a "snapshot" of what the child has learned so far. Studying at the last minute for the test won't help very much because the tests will cover more schoolwork than can be learned in a few extra hours.

Find out from the school as much as you can about the tests. Find out what day or days the tests will be given, and about how long the testing will take. The more you know, the better you can prepare your child. We all do better when we know what to expect.

Let your child know you expect him or her to do the best he or she can. Encourage your child to try to answer each question without lingering too long on any one question. Let the child know that students might not finish every part of the test.

How to Help Your Child-The Day of the Test:

Start the day calmly. Reassure your child again that it is ok (normal!) to feel a little nervous. In fact, he or she will probably do a better job and be more alert. Be sure your child has a good, nourishing breakfast each day of the test.

Test-taking is hard work and takes lots of energy. Pack a nutritious snack and/or lunch for later. Be sure your child is at school on time. Rushing, and worrying about being late could affect performance on the test.

Remind your child to follow directions carefully and that you know he or she will do the best possible. Don't overload the child with too much advice and words of wisdom.

And don't forget to ask at the end of the day how it went from your child's point of view.

How to Help Your Child-After the test:

Ask the teacher if the test results are consistent with your child's classroom performance. Let the teacher know if you feel the results don't match what you feel to be your child's abilities. Pass along any information about unusual circumstances during the test-taking, illness for example.

Ask your child's teacher to suggest activities that will help improve any weak areas revealed by the testing. Share the results with your child in a matter-of-fact way. Point out your child's strengths as well as areas in which he or she is not as strong. Be careful not to give the impression that you are judging your child on the test results.

Tests are only one way to measure your child's progress in school. Remember there is no such thing as a bad test result. Every test-taking reveals important information about your child's progress in school.

Continue to show interest in your child's school and schoolwork. Continue to encourage your child's interest in learning new things.

For more information on the company, Data Recognition Corporation, that produces the TerraNova assessment, please feel free to visit their website at www.datarecognitioncorp.com. For more information on the TerraNova assessment, you may view the product website at www.TerraNova3.com