



### **Soaring for Success with Standardized Tests**

By Becky Ramsey, Public School Representative

As the end of the school year gets closer, teachers and students are contemplating those end-of-the-year tests that have become the standard for evaluating what students have accomplished that year. Some states, such as the one where I teach, use the scores to develop a grade for the entire school based on the progress or lack of progress students have made. While teachers have been working to help students make progress, there are many additional steps to help a child feel emotionally and academically prepared to do well on these intimidating tests.

The first thing a teacher should do to prepare students is to take a test that is like the one his or her students will face. Taking the test early in the year will allow a teacher more time to prepare students for this academic activity. The administration required our staff to take a past year's test before the school year even started. Then we had to analyze how that experience would alter how we taught during the upcoming year.

#### **Test Vocabulary Is Important**

The first thing I noticed was that students must have a working understanding of the vocabulary used on the test. There are many ways to express questions on tests, and teachers should make sure they are using terms and expressions that our students will experience when they face the test. Students may know how to solve a type of problem, but if they do not understand what the test asks them to do, solving it will be impossible. Students need to practice for the test, and understanding the language of the test is a first step.

#### **Knowing the Format Is Important**

Teachers should prepare the children for the format of the test, especially if the test is computer-generated. Taking a test on an electronic device is not a fair test for every student because some do not

have access to those devices outside of the classroom. As students become familiar with using the devices on which they will take their test, they will have a better opportunity to express what they truly know. While taking tests electronically helps the testing organization to evaluate the tests, the playing field may not be even for each student when taking that test electronically. A student who does not have access to electronic devices at home is at a definite disadvantage over a student who has learned to operate these devices by frequent use. We need to offer many opportunities throughout the year to respond to questions using devices so students can avoid intimidation when it becomes necessary for them to operate the device.

### **Review of Concepts Is Important**

Teachers need to remember that these tests will evaluate all the concepts that are taught throughout the year. Review the concepts taught and mastered at the beginning of the year frequently throughout the year to allow students to remain fresh in remembering those concepts we cover in the fall.

Julia Davis, a teacher at Cold Harbor Elementary School in Virginia, recommends: "I start each subject with three questions that I have written on the overhead. The first question is always something that we learned several weeks or months ago, the second question is on something within the past month, and the third question is on a recent lesson (which often leads right into that day's lesson)" ("Top 5 Ways to Prepare Students for Standardized Tests," *Scholastic*)\*. Using regular review times will help students to keep their skills ready to apply on those end-of-the-year evaluations.

### **Start the Day in a Routine Way**

Starting test days with the normal school-day routine helps students to be more comfortable during testing. Starting the day in a familiar fashion will make the day seem less intimidating. Emphasizing a student's best efforts rather than heralding only the top scores earned by a few helps each student to feel that he or she can be successful. Teach "in-your-seat" stretches and take advantage of breaks between sections of the test to help students avoid test-burn-out. Give each student a peppermint to suck on to calm butterflies in the tummy and stimulate brain waves. This practice also starts the test with a small reward. One of my co-teachers used peppermint treats during all her math tests, not just at the end-of-the-year test. This practice was a small investment to allow the students to feel they had an edge on concentrating during each test they took in their classroom.

Teachers should not pass on to the students the pressure of outside forces to see positive test scores. Children struggle enough to show all they have learned on the test. They do not need the trickle-down stress from the state to administration to teaching staff to influence how they perform these important evaluations.

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Sources:

<https://www.scholastic.com/teachers/articles/teaching-content/top-5-ways-prepare-students-standardized-tests/>