

## What Parents Should Know About Testing 10 Key Questions

by Michael H. Kean

(NAPSA)—As testing becomes a major part of state and federal school improvement efforts, parents are seeking a greater understanding of the role of testing. Parents also want to know how they can best help their children. Much of what parents need to know about testing can be found by asking 10 key questions.

### 1. Question: Why should my child take this test?

**Answer:** Tests provide objective and consistent methods to measure what students have learned and what they need to learn. Equally important, tests provide teachers with valuable information about how they can target instruction to best help children achieve.

### 2. Question: What do tests measure?

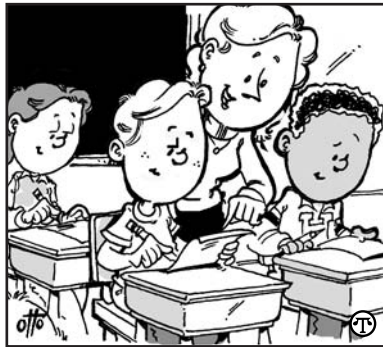
**Answer:** Tests can be designed to measure any number of things: reading skills, the ability to solve problems, mathematical concepts, spelling and so on. Many states have established testing programs that are closely aligned with state education standards specifying what students should know and be able to do at each grade level—enabling parents to monitor a child's progress.

### 3. Question: Can my child be advanced a grade—or held back—solely on her performance on a test?

**Answer:** Although some states are linking test results to “high stakes” decisions such as promotion and graduation, test scores typically are not the sole determining factor. The vast majority of states use *multiple measures*—including other types of tests, course grades, attendance records and individual evaluations made by teachers and specialists—in making high stakes decisions.

### 4. Question: What about criticisms concerning “teaching to the test”?

**Answer:** Since tests are designed to determine what children know, teachers are expected



### Standardized tests can help track a student's progress.

to teach the general curriculum content that will be measured. Providing instruction linked to curriculum standards is appropriate and desirable. However, teaching the same questions that actually appear on the test prior to the test administration invalidates the test and is considered unethical.

### 5. Question: How do we know that the test is accurate?

**Answer:** The major standardized tests undergo extensive and rigorous research and development phases to ensure that they are valid, fair and reliable.

### 6. Question: Who will help me understand and interpret my child's scores?

**Answer:** Once the scores are available, schedule a meeting with your child's teacher to learn more about your child's progress and how you can assist in his or her intellectual growth.

### 7. Question: How will the school district use the scores from the test?

**Answer:** Test scores are used in a variety of ways. They provide feedback to teachers and parents about a child's performance so that instruction can be targeted to specific areas where help is needed. School districts and states may also use test results to help evaluate instructional programs and individual schools to ensure that they are effective.

### 8. Question: Are today's tests different from those used in the 1960s and 1970s?

**Answer:** Today's tests are more engaging and interesting through their use of color, stories and illustrations. That's not all. The tests themselves have changed. While the “fill in the circle” type test is still commonly used, new types of tests include short essays, experiments and even team projects.

### 9. Question: Will my child learn anything from the test?

**Answer:** Most likely, yes. Over the past 10 years, many standardized tests have been redesigned to make test items more instructional in nature. Children will also learn time management and discipline, as most tests provide a finite amount of time to answer the questions, preparing the student for real life situations with time-sensitive tasks and problem solving.

### 10. Question: How can I help my child prepare for the test?

**Answer:** First and foremost, support all aspects of your children's education. Monitor their progress, and make sure they are getting the help they need to succeed. Get to know their teachers. Have an ongoing dialogue with your children, asking questions about the subject matter of their tests, and help them establish a healthy study pattern. Helping children prepare long before a test is a critical factor to their doing well on the test. When test time comes, be positive and supportive. Don't encourage your children to “cram” for a test. Standardized tests measure cumulative skills that cannot be improved by cramming. Children should get a good night's rest and eat a nutritious breakfast before a test.

Further information is available from the School Division of the Association of American Publishers ([www.publishers.org](http://www.publishers.org)) and from any of the major test publishers.

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