



Every Child. Every Day. For a Better Tomorrow.

How to talk to your child about test results

North Carolina aligned its state tests with the Common Core standards in 2012-2013. That meant that CMS students took new End-of-Year and End-of-Course assessments that reflected more rigorous standards in 2012-2013 and again in the 2013-2014 school year. The tests were more challenging than earlier ones, asking students to show what they know in richer and more complex ways that required higher-level thinking and reasoning skills. These skills will better prepare students for college and to compete for jobs in tomorrow's global workplace.

As the second year of test results aligned with the Common Core standards are released, we encourage our parents to talk to their children about the tests and his or her performance on them. These tips are intended to provide ideas about that discussion.

- Ask your child to share what was difficult about the tests, what was easy and identify areas where help is needed.
- Remind your child that the tests are meant to help teachers support his/her learning.
- Explain that tests are one of several ways that teachers find out what students have learned and what areas need more work.
- Reassure your child that you, teachers and school staff all believe in and will support him/her to ensure college and career success after graduation.
- Discuss with your child all the ways that he/she is preparing for the future.
- Tell your child that the tests are only one piece of what they know as a student and that the tests give teachers information about where support is needed. Explain that teachers also look at class work, effort and other factors to get a full picture of who he/she is as a student.
- Tell your child that when tests or schoolwork seems really hard, it is important to keep trying and not give up. Reassure your child that it is okay to struggle and you believe he/she can meet the challenge. Remind your child never to be afraid to ask teachers and other adults questions regarding his/her schoolwork, the tests and the new standards.
- Remind your child that by continuing to work hard and persist through difficulties, he/she will be prepared to be successful in school and life.

Other Resources

Helping Your Child Navigate the Common Core Test Results

by Morris Cohen

With results coming in from the state regarding the increasingly difficult Common Core testing, everyone from teachers to parents to administrators to students is struggling to adjust to the often disappointing results.

After years of coordinating a middle school mental health clinic, I have conducted hundreds of discussions around poor testing and grades with students and parents. And regardless of where you stand on high-stakes testing, the way in which you discuss test results with your child can have a significant effect on their well-being, and yours by extension.

Here are some of the most effective tactics I've found that work for parents:

➤ **Stay Calm**

While many parents can feel disappointed, angry, and/or frustrated by poor test results, it is important to remember that this is just one test result and that getting angry about it will not help your child succeed next time. In fact, expressing your own anxiety will only increase your child's anxiety level come Spring 2014 when he or she takes the test again. And, believe me, students are plenty anxious about the testing to begin with.

➤ **If Your Child Performed Well, Emphasize How Hard They Worked**

Try to resist the urge to tell your child how smart they are, and instead praise them for the effort they put into their performance. Praise is an important factor in helping children stay positive about their education. However, when parents compliment children on their innate intelligence, rather than their effort, research finds they will stick to what they know they are good at, rather than embrace challenge and change, which is vital towards acquiring new skills.

➤ **If Your Child Performed Poorly, Maintain a Positive Outlook, and Model This**

This was the first year that New York State implemented these more difficult exams and education experts predicted that there would be a drop in scores across the board. You can communicate this to your child and tell them that the tests are a work in progress.

"This is the first year implementing the new exams and the system is adjusting," NYC-based psychotherapist and former school psychologist Catherine Cattell told me, suggesting parents can use the tests as a model for the learning process. "Parents can be direct when discussing their child's performance on the exam," and tell their kids "don't beat yourself up. Be positive, don't focus your energy on what didn't work, but rather to change things for the better."

In other words, a poor test result is a challenge to be overcome, rather than a permanent failure. The more parents work with their child's school and teachers to help them realize this, the better it will be for their kids the next time they sit down for a test.

➤ **Utilize the Multiple Intelligences Theory**

In the early 1980's, developmental psychologist Howard Gardner introduced his theory of Multiple Intelligences. In a nutshell, multiple intelligences theory refers to the different ways that we all learn and take in information, ranging from visual, to auditory, to spatial. The theory states that we all have multiple intelligences, but standardized tests only evaluate a narrow slice of them.

The metaphor I use to describe this to kids is that their intelligence is a giant pizza pie. Each slice is a different part of how they learn and display how smart they are in many different ways. Then I ask the kids to imagine only getting to take one slice. I tell them that slice is the test, but that in life there's the whole rest of the pie left over, and there are plenty of opportunities to eat that whole pizza to show how smart they are!

Advice from parent and National Teacher of the Year Sarah Brown Wessling

When the results come in take the “three bears” approach. I often think about baby bear in these situations: not too much, not too little, but finding that *just right* reaction. Too much enthusiasm (either positive or negative) and the test becomes the epitome of all school experience. Too little reaction and it becomes negligible. So, when finding that sweet spot of reaction, just remember that when we praise or question the *behaviors* more than the score, we’re fostering life-long learning habits. This could sound something like:

- *I'm so proud of the way you worked so hard all year to get ready for this. Those times you had to struggle really paid off.*
- *This success really tells me that you stayed focused for the entire exam and I know that's hard to do.*
- *Are you happy with your performance? What would you have done differently to get ready it?*

But perhaps the most important message we give our kids when talking to them about standardized tests is that while exams are important, they are but a snapshot of a student's academic story. At no point is a child the equivalent of her score on a standardized test. Exams can reveal, they can guide, they can create urgency and they can validate. Yet, we all know *and must remember to say* that a child should never be reduced to a test score and should always be filled with the belief and confidence that he asserts his own amazing potential.