Getting Parent Support for Standardized Test Success

How involved are the parents at your school in supporting your efforts to achieve adequate yearly progress (AYP) on standardized tests required by No Child Left Behind (NCLB)?

Our latest Parent Institute survey of more than 15,000 education leaders reveals that schools have developed a wide range of ways that parents can help ensure standardized test success. We are using the survey findings and related research to prepare a kit that schools can use to assist busy parents in helping their children succeed on standardized tests. Here are highlights from hundreds of promising practices we identified in our research:

Inform parents early in the school year about the purpose of standardized tests, how test scores are used, and what parents can do to help their children. Although most parents have heard of NCLB and know that annual standardized tests are required, a surprising number do not know why the tests are given, what subjects they cover, or why the tests are important to the school and to their children. Research has repeatedly shown that parents want to help their children be successful but often feel that they are not qualified to help. Parents say that if they had specific information about what to do, they would help their children prepare for tests and help their children’s school boost test scores.

Hold meetings and workshops for parents about standardized test success. One school stages a “parent university night” that includes general and concurrent sessions on test-related topics that are presented by local teachers, counselors, or other staff. Other schools offer a series of single-topic programs on testing throughout the year, often reviewing sample test materials provided by their own state board of education.

Many schools report holding “get ready for the test” meetings in the weeks just prior to actual testing dates to urge parents to review test-taking skills with their children; to remind parents to avoid scheduling appointments for children during test days; to make sure children get plenty of sleep in the days preceding the test; and to provide a good breakfast on the day of the test. One school even encourages parents to maintain peace at home during test time so that children will not come to school upset and unable to do their best.

Make print and online information about testing available to parents throughout the year. Also provide an information blitz about three weeks before the testing period. Schools report that distributing notes, letters, newsletters, fliers, booklets, and pamphlets on test-related topics is essential to an overall communication plan on testing. Making test success materials available, for example, through a parent resource center is an effective strategy.

Many schools publish a testing calendar nine months ahead so that parents don’t schedule appointments and vacations during the testing period. School newsletters regularly print the testing calendar and parent newsletters feature testing tips and strategies to help students do their best.

Provide parents with specific duties to help their children succeed on standardized tests. While many schools supply parents with information about testing, like schedules and general tips, some schools provide parents with training and materials to help their children at home with math and reading skills. Other schools promote parental buy-in by establishing accountability contracts between parents, teachers, and students that outline what parents need to do at home to help their child succeed.

One principal charges parents to motivate their children by reinforcing how smart they are, and telling them “their teacher knows it, their parents know it, and now they just need to let the state know it.”

Although the lion’s share of most schools’ efforts to achieve AYP on standardized tests is focused internally on teachers and students, there is evidence that powerful help is available from parents, simply for the asking. Enlisting parent support for students to do their best on standardized tests seems to be one of the most powerful appeals schools can make to parents, especially as test time draws near—and there’s still time this school year to tap into that power!

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John H. Wherry is president of The Parent Institute in Fairfax, Virginia. His e-mail address is jhw@parent-institute.com.

For More Information

To request a free summary of “25 Top Ideas to Involve Parents in Boosting Standardized Test Performance,” contact John Wherry at jhw@parent-institute.com. For information about other materials to involve parents in test success, visit www.parentinstitute.com.
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