

## Tips for Parents: Test Scores

**What are these tests supposed to measure?** Standardized achievement tests are designed to rank a student with respect to other students across the country who take the same test. Standardized achievement tests do not tell you what your child knows, but what he or she shows in relation to other children. They do not tell you how well your child is being taught in school, or whether he or she is in a good school or bad school.

The questions included on standardized tests are designed to point out the differences among students. Such tests are written so that, for any one question, about half the students who take the test will generally get the answer right.

This means subject matter that may be very important—that may have been very well taught by the teacher and well learned by your child—may not appear on the test at all because items measuring such content would probably be answered correctly by most students. Oft-revised standardized achievement tests tend to excise most items answered correctly by large percentages of test-takers.

**What does the test say about my child's abilities?** The test tells you your child's standing relative to other children based on a particular body of knowledge. There is a link between your child's test score and level of ability, but this link is sometimes very tenuous.

Teaching varies greatly from school district to school district in terms of how much of a particular subject is covered and when. Many standardized tests, however, are national—the same test is taken by every student, regardless of the curriculum at the particular school. If your child has a lower score on a nationally standardized achievement test, this could simply indicate the material on the test may not have been covered yet in your child's class.

### There are two main types of scores

**What is a percentile?** The percentile score specifies where your child falls in relationship to other students. If your child scores at the 80<sup>th</sup> percentile, this means your child did better on the test than 80 percent of other students who took it. It *does not mean* that your child answered 80 percent of the questions correctly. .

**What does the grade equivalent score mean?** This score can cause a great deal of confusion because it compares your child's performance to the performance of a child in another grade. If your second grader takes a test and receives a score of 3.7, it means that your child did as well on the test as the average student in the 7<sup>th</sup> month of 3<sup>rd</sup> grade would do on the same test. (A score of 4.2 would be the same performance as the average student in the 2<sup>nd</sup> month of 4<sup>th</sup> grade.)

This suggests that if the average third grader took the test after seven months of school, the third grader would do the same as your child. It *does not mean* that your child would make the same score as the third grader if your child took a third-grade test. The test would contain material your child hadn't learned yet. Therefore, a high grade-equivalent score does not mean your child should be promoted to a higher grade. Also, keep in mind that the grade-equivalent score is, at best, only a rough, approximate score.

### **You may have questions if scores are lower than you expected**

**How can my child earn good grades and still do poorly on standardized tests?** Many of the factors that contribute to a child's academic success in school are not tested by standardized achievement tests. For this reason, a test score cannot be used as a good reflection of your child's academic success in school. Remember, the test does not measure qualities such as discipline and hard work

**How can my child's performance on standardized tests be improved?** Probably the single most important skill your child needs in order to do well on a standardized test is *reading*. The best way for you to help improve your child's performance on the test is to encourage your child to read. Let your child see you reading at home, and read to young children whenever possible. Remember, good reading skills will improve your child's performance in all areas of academics.

**Will the school treat my child differently because of a test score?** One of the most common uses of standardized tests is to help teachers decide whether children should be placed in gifted or remedial classes. Therefore, if your child receives an unusually high or unusually low score in relation to others in class, the teacher may decide that your child needs a special program. It's important for parents to make sure the teacher's reaction to the score is appropriate. Your child's grades and performance in class should always be taken into account when making any such decision. If the teacher tries to suggest that your child repeat a grade or wait to enter first grade, you should be prepared to argue that such a decision should never be made on the basis of a single test score.

For more information:

The National Center for Fair & Open Testing

<http://www.fairtest.org/>

Video: "A Parents' Guide to Standardized Tests"

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