

SCOTT MANDEL

IMPROVING TEST SCORES

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School Datebooks
What Can I As a Parent
Do to Help My Child
Score Better on the School's
Standardized Tests?

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WHAT CAN I AS A PARENT DO TO HELP MY CHILD

SCORE BETTER ON THE SCHOOL'S STANDARDIZED TESTS?

In today's educational society, parents are becoming partners with the schools at an increasing rate. No longer can parents simply blame the school for a student's lack of success. No longer can the school simply blame the parent for a student's lack of success. Administrators, teachers, parents and students must be partners together in raising student test scores.

The following are 10 simple suggestions for parents to help in their part in raising their child's test scores.

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Parent Tips for Improving Your Child's Test Scores

There are a number of things that you can do at home to create a situation where your child can succeed on the school's standardized tests and raise their scores.

Everyone has a critical part in the testing process. Teachers, administrators, students and parents, too. Helping to insure that your child goes to school in the best physical and mental condition possible is the parents' role in raising test scores.

Make sure your child eats a good breakfast every testing day.

Breakfast provides the energy necessary for your child to focus on the test. An athlete would never consider competing in any sport without having eaten during the day. A student cannot concentrate fully without having had the necessary food intake earlier in the day.

However, there are a few very important points to consider during breakfast. First and foremost, sugar intake should be severely limited the morning of a test! Sugared cereals, sugared juices, donuts, cookies and high-sugar items such as these should be avoided at all costs. This will leave "sugar-high" for the student who lacks food in their diet. Unfortunately, at that point, a huge "sugar-low" then hits the student. The result of this low is your child having less energy than before breakfast. This will directly affect performance on the tests that day.

Instead of sugar-based food, your child should eat things such as whole-wheat breads, fruit and some sort of protein for breakfast. Pancakes, French toast, sausages, eggs are all good types of breakfasts on the day of a test. These foods give long-lasting energy which will directly affect your child's performance on the school's standardized tests.

Have your child get a good night's sleep before a testing day.

A good night's sleep before a test is as critical for success the next day as breakfast. Many students—especially those in middle and high school—do not fully wake up until second or third period. On a normal testing day, this would be well into the first test of the day. You may have a little battle on your hands, but be sure to get your child to bed at a reasonable time the night before a test.

Get your child to school on time.

It's critical that you get your child to school in time on testing days. When students come to school late, the following things often happen:

- *Their stress level is raised, causing them to do less than their best on the tests.*
- *If they arrive after the test has started, they may not enter the testing room. They have to go to a "holding room" for the entire test session and then get pulled out of class on another day for a make-up exam.*

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Try to limit morning stress.

Student stress is a major factor in doing less-than-their-best on tests. Although this can be difficult, avoid silent arguments and reprimands with your child the mornings of the standardized tests. Hold the discussions off until the afternoon or evening, when your child's concentration is sharper for succeeding on the exam.

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Provide incentives.

The school often provides motivational awards for students to have excellent attendance and to do their best during the testing period. Parents can use the same strategy. Provide some sort of incentive for your child to eat a good breakfast on test days and to get a good night's sleep the evening before the exam.

Help the school motivate your child.

Talk to your school and find out what type of incentive programs are being carried out for motivating the students. These may be attendance incentives, raffles, special testing breakfasts. Be aware of what is happening and talk to your child and help motivate him or her to do his or her best during the testing situations.

If you are a member of the school's PTSA, you can help with some sort of fun, spirit-filled promotional events during the week before and during testing. By creating a "pep rally-type" of atmosphere throughout the school during the testing period, the excitement and motivation to do well on the tests will dramatically increase for the students.

Having parents involved in the process demonstrates to the students that the standardized tests are important—important enough that parents are willing to donate their time and efforts to helping the school raise their test scores.

◆ *Make sure your child eats a good breakfast every testing day.*

◆ *Your child get a good night's sleep before a testing day.*

◆ *Get your child to school on time.*

◆ *Try to limit morning stress.*

◆ *Provide incentives.*

◆ *Help the school motivate your child*

How to help your child succeed with the new common core tests.

The Common Core may seem scary to most parents, based on the way school district and the media are presenting it.

But in reality, it takes us back to the days before No Child Left Behind. How so? The following are central to the system:

- Your child's teachers once again have academic freedom—the standards tell what students should learn, not how teachers should teach. Teachers are now free to use their creativity and professional knowledge to adapt the curricula to what best serves the needs of their students.
- The curricular focus is on teaching your child how to use higher order critical thinking—not just memorization of facts.

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There are four basic parts of the new Common Core:

- ◆ The use of Higher Order Critical Thinking
- ◆ Having the students find and present evidence to back up their answers.
- ◆ Ensuring the students understand the basic material before they move on to the next curricular area.
- ◆ Increasing the use of non-fiction to approximately 50% of the time (versus the current 10% in most Language Arts classrooms)

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How can you prepare your child for Common Core success?

1. When you question them about what they've learned, practice using higher order critical thinking questions.

This is the most important aspect of the Common Core - thinking at a high level. Most questions that a parent asks are of this sort:

who, what, why, when, where, which

These are all considered lower level critical thinking questions. They do not involve a lot of thought—mostly just remember what was read.

To prepare for Common Core success, you should try to ask your child higher level questions such as these:

analyze, categorize, classify, compare, contrast, examine, simplify, infer, conclude, develop, estimate, formulate, invent, originate, plan, predict, modify, theorize, elaborate, criticize, determine, evaluate, justify, interpret

This does not mean that you no longer use low-level thinking questions. Quite the contrary. Those types of questions are critical to ensuring basic comprehension of the material.

However, higher-level thinking questions should become a regular part of all discussions. An easy way to ensure their use is to keep a list of these question words with you when you help your child with homework or studying. Continually refer to them as you ask your child even one low-level question that you ask.

You can find excellent resources and examples of higher order critical thinking questions and techniques at the Internet site: www.bloomstaxonomy.org

2. Help your child practice finding evidence for their answers

When helping your child with homework, or studying for a test, ask them to "prove" their answer. Have them locate the information for you in the book. This will give them practice in finding evidence for their answers.

3. Make sure your child understands the material before moving on

Make sure that your child understands the material before they move on. If a test comes home with many incorrect answers, review it with your child, ensuring that the correct answers are located.

4. Make sure your child is reading non-fiction

Along with novels and other things they like to read, encourage your child to read non-fiction works on a regular basis. These include:

- Biographies and autobiographies
- Historical pieces
- Articles and essays - paper or online
- Magazines - paper or online
- Newspapers - paper or online

It doesn't matter if they are in paper form, online or on a tablet, they need to read non-fiction! It will greatly prepare your child for the type of material that will be used - and tested - with the new Common Core.

Where can you go to get more help?

The Internet has become a fantastic tool to enable parents to get curricular help for their child. Many educational web sites can be used to locate material for two reasons:

- **To give the student extra help in extending a topic that is covered in class, or clarifying material**
- **To give the parent background material in a subject that the child is learning so as to be able to understand the material and assist the child in their work or studying**

To help your child or simply improve your personal understanding of a subject, there are two ways of easily locating curricular material:

Go to a general education web site. Bookmark the site Teachers Helping Teachers on your computer (<http://teachershelpingteachers.com/educational-resources/>). Scroll down to the Educational Resources page. On this page you will find dozens of subject matter sites that you can use that will pertain to areas that your child is studying in school. You can also go to the Guest Book and leave a message/question for teachers if you cannot locate the material you want.

Go to a specific subject matter site. The following are a list of good sites that you can use to find information on a specific topic:

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History/Social Studies

ANCIENT HISTORY: Internet Sourcebook www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/latbook.html

AMERICAN HISTORY: History www.brynet.org/~jw/ahome.htm

MODERN HISTORY: www.sos.state.fl.us/edcharters/modernhistory/modernhistory.htm

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Language Arts

LITERATURE: Middle School English Web Center www.victoria.tlcsd.k12.ca.us/~mcdowell/index.html

GRAMMAR: Grammar - Grammar/Style www.english-test.net/grammar/style.html

Math

GENERAL MATH: Math Forum mathforum.org

ALGEBRA: Algebra Homework Help and Solvers www.algebra.com

GEOMETRY: Geometry Resources www.learner.org/resources/series167.html

Science

BIOLOGY: The Biology Project www.biology.arizona.edu/default.html

CHEMISTRY: Chemistry Resources chem.lapeer.org/Chem1Docs/index.php

PHYSICAL SCIENCE: Eric Weisstein's World of Physics scienceworld.wolfram.com/physics

The Arts

THE ARTS: World Wide Arts Resources wwar.com