

Practical Parenting Partnerships

A Parent's Guide To The



Missouri Assessment Program

www.pppctr.org

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A Parent's Guide to the Missouri Assessment Program

What you and your children should know about the MAP.

Foreword

As parents, we want our children to be successful. In sports, the number of points scored, strikes thrown, or yards gained measures success. In school, student success is measured in other ways such as learning multiplication facts, completing homework, or grades on report cards and tests.

Likewise, in Missouri and nationwide, there are programs in place to measure a child's performance, or success, in school. The Missouri Assessment Program, or MAP, was created in response to Missouri's Outstanding Schools Act of 1993. When the national No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) was passed into law, Missouri's Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) began revisions on the MAP to comply. These two legislations are similar in that they were both designed to help raise student performance. No Child Left Behind requires states to use federal funds to improve education.

The following booklet gives information about the Missouri Assessment Program, how to help reduce test anxiety, and how you can help your child succeed on tests.



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If your child is a student in a Missouri public or charter school, chances are you've heard of the Missouri Assessment Program.

- **What is the Missouri Assessment Program anyway?**

Most people call it MAP. The MAP is a series of tests that measure whether students in Missouri are meeting the Show-Me Standards. It's a way of finding out if kids are learning what they need to learn.

- **Wait. Back up. Tell me about these "Show-Me Standards."**

In 1993, the Outstanding Schools Act was passed in Missouri. This law called for the development of a new assessment system for Missouri's public schools. The Show-Me Standards are part of that legislation. There are 40 "Content" standards and 33 "Process" standards. They are guides for what students should *know* and be able to *do*. In the medical field, there are standards for what a doctor should know and be able to do. You expect an auto mechanic to meet certain standards for repairing or servicing your car. The Show-Me Standards are similar in that they are the educational standards in Missouri. An abbreviated copy of the Show-Me Standards can be found in Appendix A at the back of this booklet.

- **That looks like a lot for our kids to learn. Why does it have to be so difficult?**

Actually, the Missouri Department of Education, along with hundreds of Missouri teachers, is working to make it easier for students and teachers. They've used the Show-Me Standards to develop Grade-Level Expectations (GLEs) for each subject. The GLEs give specific targets for instruction at each grade level, so teachers know what needs to be taught, and children and their parents know what students are expected to learn. Go to <http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/curriculum/GLEDocuments.html> if you'd like to see these GLEs. You might also ask your child's school for a copy.

- **That's a relief. So why the big push for Standards and Assessments?**

Setting high standards for all students is intended to help our children to grow into educated adults. Assessments like the MAP are needed to be sure our students are learning, and that schools are held accountable for providing our children with the best education possible. It's similar to taking a driving test. We want competent and safe drivers out there, so we give potential drivers a test to demonstrate their knowledge and driving ability before receiving a license.



- **Is Missouri the only state setting Standards and measuring them with achievement tests?**

No. When the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 was passed, all 50 states, as well as the District of Columbia and Puerto Rico were required to begin developing standards and assessments and begin implementing them by the 2005-06 school year.

- **How is the MAP different than the old achievement tests I remember?**

The MAP was created not only to assess knowledge, but also to measure how well a student can apply that knowledge to different situations. The MAP uses three different types of questions. Now, in addition to multiple-choice questions (like most of the older tests used), they've added short-answer, or constructed-response questions.

With these items, students can construct or supply an answer rather than choosing from a list of choices. Remember the driver's test? One part of the test is the written examination, with multiple-choice questions. The "real" driving part of the test is very similar to the third type of question on the MAP tests. This type of question is called a performance event.



- **Performance Event? That sounds like a big deal.**

It's just one more way that students can show what they know and apply it to real world situations--the *doing* part. It's like the auto mechanic thing. You want your mechanic to know details about the engine, but you also expect her to apply her knowledge of the engine to *do* something about fixing it. It's the same on MAP performance events. For example, on a Communication Arts test, students demonstrate their knowledge by writing an essay. On the Mathematics test, students solve multiple-step problems similar to things they encounter in everyday life.

- **You mentioned Communication Arts. Is that Reading and Writing?**

Yes. Reading, Writing, English, and Spelling are all included with Communication Arts.

- **Are there other subjects tested besides Math and Communication Arts?**

Yes. Science and Social Studies were voluntary through 2007 school year. Social Studies will not be offered in 2008, and Science will be required just as Math and Communication Arts are now. Before funding ran out, Missouri students took a Health/Physical Education test and a Fine Arts test as well.

- **That’s a lot of testing. But what does funding have to do with it?**

As you might guess, it costs a lot of money to create and score the tests. Because students are writing their own answers for certain parts, a computer can’t score it like on some other types of tests.



- **I’ll bet there’s a big company involved that doesn’t know anything about Missouri kids.**

CTB/McGraw Hill is a large company, but luckily for us, they work with Missouri educators in designing and grading the tests. Multiple-choice questions are scored by machine. Constructed response and performance event questions on the tests must be scored by hand. In 2006, over 500 Missouri educators were trained, qualified, and helped score the tests at 12 scoring sites across the state.

- **Who gives the tests?**

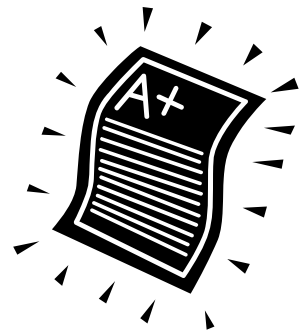
Normally your child’s classroom teacher, the school counselor, or the district/school test coordinator will administer the exams.

- **When are the tests given?**

MAP testing is scheduled in the spring, usually during the month of April. That way teachers and students get most of a school year to prepare.

- **Will my child have to take these MAP tests every year while he is in school or just when he graduates?**

In Mathematics and Communication Arts, all public and charter schools in Missouri are required to give the MAP, but students are not tested in each grade level. The first “official” tests the students take are Communication Arts and Mathematics in third grade. It assesses information that the students have been learning since they entered kindergarten.



It’s important to remember that although your child takes his first state-required Communication Arts and Mathematics exams as a third grader, his third grade teacher is not responsible for teaching him everything he needs to know for the tests. These and all other subjects are important and need to be learned gradually, not just when the child gets to third grade. All teachers and parents need to make an effort to work together to educate our children.

- **Let me see if I understand you. My child doesn't learn all the material for the MAP tests in one year, but rather over several school years?**

You understand perfectly.

- **Do they test all grade levels?**

Yes, it makes sense to check on our students' progress at different points throughout their school years. The NCLB law requires that every public school and charter school student in the nation be tested in Math and Communication Arts each year in grades 3-8 and at least once during grades 10-12. It also calls for Science tests no later than the 2007-08 school year at least once during grades 3-5, 6-9, and 10-12.

DESE's projected assessment schedule below might make it easier to understand.

Subject Areas	2006	2007	2008
Communication Arts	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11
Mathematics	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10
Science	3, 7, 10 (voluntary)	3, 7, 10 (voluntary)	5, 8, 11 (required)
Social Studies	4, 8, 11 (voluntary)	4, 8, 11 (voluntary)	NOT OFFERED
MAP-Alternate	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 (Math), 11 (CA)	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 (Math), 11 (CA)	3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10 (Math), 11 (CA)

- **Won't these tests take a lot of time and money to score, too?**

Yes, but what I didn't mention is that the newest grade-level Communication Arts and Mathematics assessments are slightly shorter than in the recent past. The Communication Arts tests for grades 3, 7 and 11 will continue to include multiple-choice and constructed-response items as well as performance events, while the tests for grades 4, 5, 6 and 8 will include only multiple-choice and constructed-response items. Similarly, the Mathematics tests for grades 4, 8 and 10 will continue to include multiple-choice and constructed-response items as well as performance events, while the tests for grades 3, 5, 6 and 7 will include only multiple-choice and constructed-response items. Fewer test questions mean less expense when scoring.



- **How long do these tests take?**

It depends on the student. The tests are given in 2 or 3 different sessions with an estimated time allowance. Some students finish very quickly, while others use all of the time allotted. If a student is making progress when the suggested time is up, he or she should be allowed to finish.

- **May I see my child's results?**

Yes. The results are available the following fall. Schools receive a substantial amount of MAP data, so it's probably worthwhile to make a visit to the school counselor for more information, especially if you haven't received your child's results by mid-fall. Fall parent-teacher conferences would be a perfect time to ask questions about the achievement tests.

If you have Internet access, you can check out district and statewide MAP results at <http://dese.mo.gov/schooldata/>, and choose your district or charter school from the alphabetical list. Look for "School District Report Card" in the upper right hand corner of the screen. The reports found here will show lots of information on how your child's school and district performed. Many school district websites show these results, also.

- **What should I look for?**

On the site listed above, you'll find out how each grade level performed as a whole group in each subject. You'll also see the data broken down into groups, such as low income students, those receiving Title I services, African American, Hispanic, and many others.

- **But I want to know about my child's performance. How will I get that information?**

An Individual Student Report will be sent to you by the school your child attended when he took the tests. That information is private and is not made available online. Only you and your child's school receive individual student reports. On an individual student report, you'll want to first see which achievement level your child's score falls in. As a parent, it's helpful to know your child's academic strengths and areas in need of improvement. Maybe a child does a nice job fielding grounders but has difficulty hitting the ball. You're likely to spend more time on batting practice. If the MAP tests point out that your child excels in math, but struggles in reading, you'll know to put forth more effort to improve reading skills.

Secondly, there's something called a Terra Nova National Percentile. This shows how your child's score stacks up to scores from children across the nation on the multiple-choice part of the test. We shouldn't confuse a "percent" with percentile. If my daughter received a 64 "percent" on a spelling test, I might be worried. That is, 64 out of 100 total points possible. With a percentile, students are compared or ranked with other students who took the same test. For instance, if my daughter's national percentile score is a 64, she scored better than 64

percent of the students taking this test nationwide. An average score is around the 50th percentile.

- **Okay. What should I *NOT* look for?**

It's important to remember that the MAP is not perfect, nor is it designed to make sweeping judgments about skills or ability. It does measure how well students are mastering Content (knowing) and Performance (doing) Standards, but it won't tell you if your child is going to be the next Einstein. If the results are not what you hoped for, try to think of it this way. It's only one test, and it's designed to measure how well a *group* of students is doing. One test cannot possibly show everything your child can or can't do.

- **Does my child receive a class grade on the MAP test?**

It's a possibility for middle school and high school students. Some schools use carbonless copy paper to make a copy of certain sections of the test. Teachers may then grade these sections as they would a regular classroom assignment.

- **So how do I know if my child is meeting the standards, making the grade, or whatever?**

The scores of each test session in a subject are combined into a "Scale Score" and reported according to achievement levels. Missouri's goal is to help students reach the top two levels of Advanced and Proficient. However, many Missouri kids have not yet reached these levels. Until 2006, the results were reported according to five levels-Advanced, Proficient, Nearing Proficient, Progressing, and Step One. With the 2006 test administration, there are four achievement levels rather than the five that were used in the past:



1. **Advanced** (highest level): Students demonstrate in-depth understanding of all concepts and apply that knowledge in complex ways.
2. **Proficient**: This, along with the Advanced level, is the desired achievement level that Missouri has set for all students. Students demonstrate the knowledge and skills called for by the Show-Me Standards.
3. **Basic**: Students understand many key concepts, although their application of that knowledge is limited. Students are beginning to use their knowledge of simple concepts to solve basic problems, but they still make many errors.
4. **Below Basic** (lowest level): Students are substantially behind in terms of meeting the Show-Me Standards. They demonstrate a minimal understanding of fundamental concepts and little ability to apply that knowledge.

For students to receive an achievement level score, they must take all sessions of the test.

- **This is all really good information. How do I know how well *my* child did on the MAP tests?**

If you look back at Appendix B, you'll see a sample *Student Report*. The MAP test results for your child will be listed in a report like this. The results give you, the parent, valuable information. Most likely, you'll find strengths listed. Be sure to praise your child on the effort he made and recognize his positive accomplishments.

- **Will I be able to find out what my child needs to work on?**

You'll usually see some areas where improvement is needed as well. This helps you and your child's teachers to identify important skills to work on with your child. For example, if your 16 year-old failed the driver's test because he missed a stop sign, you might work with him on being more aware of his surroundings for the next exam (and the safety of other drivers).

- **The *Student Report* is like a foreign language. How about some help?**

First, you'll see a gray bar at the top of the paper with a number just to the left of the bar. The bar shows what achievement level your child's score falls in. Now, this next part is a little tricky. The number next to the bar is the "Scale Score." Remember, the "Scale Score" combines the results from the different sessions of the test.

What's tricky is this. In order to know what achievement level your child falls into, you have to look at the MAP score range in each Achievement Level Description in the middle of the report. If your child's Communication Arts Scale Score was 710, as on the sample, he would fall into the Proficient Level, whose MAP score range is 696-722. Understanding and being able to find the Scale Score and MAP score range will tell you if your child just barely reached that category or if he is close to moving up to the next level.

- **Okay, I see my child's Scale Score to the left of the gray bar. I'm not quite clear on how to tell whether he squeaked into the category or is close to moving up.**

Okay, look at the MAP score range for "Proficient" on your child's report. Let's say the range in the box is 696-722. If a child scored a 700, you know that he made it into that achievement level by the skin of his teeth. He will need to work on mastering many of the items described in the achievement level box in order to improve on next year's assessment. It's important to note here that the MAP score ranges change from grade to grade and subject to subject. Pay close attention to these score ranges.

- **What about the boxes on the right?**

They refer to the Show-Me Standards. The Content Standards are the things students should *know*, while the Process Standards describe what students should be able to *do*. Those boxes give a detailed breakdown on how close your child is to meeting those Standards. If your child earned 80% of the points on the first couple of Content Standards but only 40% of the points on Standards three and four, then you would know to sit down and work on Standards three and four.

- **I get it. What about the box on the bottom right?**

This is the Terra Nova National Percentile that we talked about. It's the multiple-choice part of the test that students across the nation--not just in Missouri--take. You can use this percentile to see how well your child is doing compared to other kids nationwide.



- **What about this “Lexile Score”?**

The Lexile Score was added in 2006 reports. It applies only to Communication Arts assessments, and is taken from Terra Nova Reading items only. It comes from *The Lexile Framework for Reading*—a scale that matches reader ability with appropriate reading materials. The score is the point on the scale where a reader can be expected to comprehend or understand 75% from a list of recommended reading materials. A Lexile Score can range from 200 for easy to read text to 1700 for advanced text. Follow this link, <http://www.lexile.com/PDF/Lexiles-at-Home-0504.pdf> to learn more about Lexile Scores and how they apply to your child.

- **What if I have more questions about the *Student Report*?**

You have a few options. First, the back of the report is helpful. Look for a copy of this behind our sample *Student Report*. Your child's teacher or school counselor can also help. Finally, you can use the DESE website. Go to http://www.dese.mo.gov/divimprove/assess/2006_gir.pdf for a more detailed “Guide to Interpreting Results” or explore the website. You can also get contact information from the website if you'd like to speak to someone in the Assessment Section of the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.

- **You mentioned earlier that the school district gets lots of MAP data. What do they use it for?**

Actually, several people use the results. These results play a major role in making the state, the schools, and the teachers accountable for providing the best education possible.

- **There's that "A" word again. So all this MAP data is about Accountability?**

In a nutshell, yes. The information below will help identify who receives this information and will provide a short description of how the reports are used.

State officials use this information to identify schools that need improvement or are top performers. This can help them to provide resources to schools that need help, or to study high performing schools in hopes of passing along "best practices." They can also compare our Missouri results with the results of schools in other states to see how we measure up nationally.

School districts can use the results to set goals or create plans to improve in areas where expectations are not met. They can also compare their results to those of nearby districts and to the state of Missouri as a whole. Test results are used to compare data from previous years as well.

Teachers can identify any improvement areas in Content or Process Standards. For example, the data might show that most fifth graders could name the body systems, but a low percentage of the same students could identify the function of each system. The teacher could use the information gained to devote more time to teaching the functions of each body system. A teacher might also use the information to address needs of individual students. Based on the results, certain teachers can also receive additional training to become more effective.

As **parents**, not only can we see how our children performed, but we can also see how well the schools are teaching our children. We can work with our community to support our schools when they need help.

Our **children** also benefit from the test results when the state, school district, teachers and parents work together to make improvements for our students. Individual results can help identify kids who need extra help or enrichment.

The **news media** uses MAP data to report information to the public. It's important for you to remember that your child's individual test results are private. Only you and your child's school receive those results. Rather, the media reports on the state, district, or school as a whole group.

- **Can the school district pass or fail my child based on his MAP scores?**

School officials may use the results as a guide to best meet the educational needs of your child, but the *Student Report* is only one factor of many to be considered in a child's education. For example, the student's grades, teacher and/or parent recommendations, and further testing along with MAP scores may help determine placement in special classes such as Gifted Education, Title I, or Special Education, or whether to pass or retain a student.



- **How can I work with my child’s teachers to help prepare for the MAP tests?**

Your willingness to work with the school is an important step. You and the teachers can collaborate on your child’s strengths and concerns that are noticed at home and in the classroom. Together, you can identify your child’s needs.

Included in Appendix C of this booklet are a few examples of the types of questions your child might see on the MAP tests. You and the teachers may want to access the DESE website to find more samples of constructed response and performance event topics. Go to <http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/assess/publications.html> and click on “MAP Classroom Assessment Item Bank.” You can also get a complete listing of released items for any given subject at http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/assess/Released_Items/riarchiveindex.html. These are questions that were once a part of actual MAP assessments or field test items, but are no longer used. These can give you and your child’s teachers ideas on what questions to ask and how best to ask them. Many schools use these released items to help students prepare for the MAP tests.



Accommodations for Students With Disabilities

- **My child has a disability. Will she still have to take the MAP test?**

Yes. Children with disabilities, just like all other children in public or charter schools, are required to show that they can put knowledge into practice by a number of state and federal laws and regulations.

- **Can my child have extra help if her disability keeps her from performing her best?**

Yes. Many students with disabilities take the MAP test at the same time and in the same way as their classmates. Some students with disabilities take the test with the help of certain accommodations. The purpose of an accommodation is to “level the playing field” so that students with disabilities can demonstrate what they know and are able to do.

- **Who decides if my child takes the MAP tests with or without accommodations?**

Every student receiving special education has an Individualized Education Program, or IEP. The IEP is developed by a team. You are a member of this team as a parent or legal guardian of your child. Decisions about accommodations that are needed for the MAP and classroom instruction are made by this team. Generally, accommodations should not be used for the first time on the MAP tests. They should already be in use during classroom instruction or tests.

- **What are some accommodations that can be provided on the MAP?**

For a student with limited vision, the size of the print on the test could be enlarged, or the test could be written in Braille. This is an example of an accommodation for a physical disability. A student with a learning disability in Reading who is taking the Mathematics test may need to have the test given individually so that the questions can be read aloud for better understanding. Some students may need additional time to complete the test or additional breaks during the test.

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- **Are there any accommodations that would cause the test results to be invalid if they were used?**

As you may have seen at the bottom of the chart, reading the Communication Arts test aloud to the student invalidates the results of that test. If the IEP team determines that this accommodation is needed, the team needs to understand that the use of this accommodation *does* invalidate the results. For students with visual impairments who use oral reading in daily instruction, the Communication Arts test *can* be read aloud without invalidating the results. The use of paraphrasing test questions will invalidate results for any of the MAP tests. Students will still receive a *Student Report* with an achievement level that reflects their performance with the accommodation that invalidated their test.

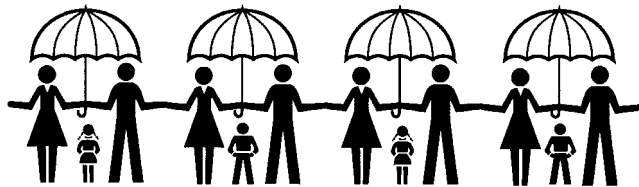
- **What are some reasons why an accommodation should not be used?**

Accommodations should NOT:

- Give students with disabilities an unfair advantage.
- Jeopardize test security in any way.
- Be used for the first time on the MAP tests.
- Give clues to the correct answer.

- **I'm learning a lot about MAP accommodations. Is there someone I can contact if I have more questions?**

Yes. You can start by asking your school counselor, test coordinator, or special services teacher or director. The DESE Division of Special Education at (573) 751-0187 can help to answer your questions. You can also visit their website <http://www.dese.mo.gov/divspeced/> for more information.



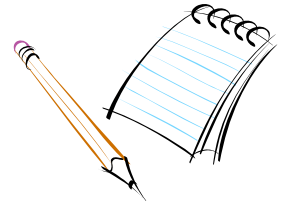
MAP-Alternate

- **Do all students take the paper and pencil MAP tests?**

Most kids, including students receiving special education, will take the regular MAP tests. However, regular paper and pencil tests may not be appropriate for some students with significant cognitive disabilities who are working mostly on essential skills. The term “essential skills” means that the main focus of the student’s education is on daily living skills. These are students with whom educational priorities address essential skills needed in adult daily living, and who, after high school, will likely require supported or assisted living. The MAP-Alternate (MAP-A) was developed for these students.

- **What is the MAP-A?**

It’s totally different from the paper and pencil tests usually given for the MAP. It’s not what you or I might usually think of as a test, and it’s required by federal law. The MAP-A shows the student’s progress over a period of three months. The newest version of the MAP-A assesses information on a student’s knowledge and skills in Communication Arts and Math. The MAP-A is a much more individualized assessment.



- **Who makes the decision on whether a child takes the MAP-A or the regular MAP tests?**

The child’s IEP team, including you as the child’s parent/legal guardian, makes that decision with input from other instructional staff such as therapists and paraprofessionals.

Each student being considered for the MAP-A must meet all five of the below criteria, as outlined by DESE.

- 1) The student has a demonstrated significant cognitive disability and adaptive behavioral skills. Therefore, the student has difficulty learning new skills, and the skills acquired must be taught in very small steps.
- 2) The student does not keep pace with peers, even with the majority of students requiring special education, with respect to the total number of skills gained.
- 3) The student’s educational program centers on the application of essential skills related to the Missouri Show-Me Standards.
- 4) The IEP team, as documented in the IEP, does not recommend participation in the MAP subject area assessments or taking the MAP with accommodations.
- 5) The student’s inability to participate in the MAP subject area assessments is *not* primarily the result of excessive absences; visual or auditory disabilities; or social, cultural, language or economic differences.

- **When do students take the MAP-A?**

You may have noticed on the chart on page 7 that the MAP-A is required in certain years, much like the subjects tested on the paper and pencil MAP tests. You'll see by looking at the chart that it is now required for grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. The Math Assessment is required in grade 10 and Communication Arts is required in grade 11.

- **Is the MAP-A scored?**

Yes. The child's teacher is required to observe and assess a student's performance and collect evidence in Communication Arts and Math during three specific collection periods. Your child's performance is assessed on Alternate Grade-Level Expectations (Alternate-GLEs). You can access the Alternate-GLEs by going to the following link: <http://www.dese.mo.gov/divimprove/assess/mapa.html>. The teacher is then responsible for submitting the MAP-A to DESE for scoring. The scored assessments will result in score reports and student achievement levels consistent with regular MAP results.

- **Where can I find more information about the MAP-A?**

Contact your school's special education director or district test coordinator, DESE's Assessment Section at (573) 751-3545, or the Division of Special Education at (573) 751-0187. You can also find more information by going to the DESE MAP-A website <http://www.dese.mo.gov/divimprove/assess/mapa.html>.



Taming Test Anxiety

What would you say about a student who has stomach cramps, headaches, needs to use the bathroom a lot, has trouble breathing, has shaky or sweaty hands, and can't remember things he knows?

- **I'd say that student should stay home in bed! Is he sick?**

Not really. He's suffering from test anxiety. Whether we like it or not, testing is a part of life. More and more kids are feeling pressure to do well, not just on standardized achievement tests, but also in every day life. We can help our children learn to stay calm and beat test stress.

- **I've always been nervous about taking tests, too. Why do some people get so worked up?**

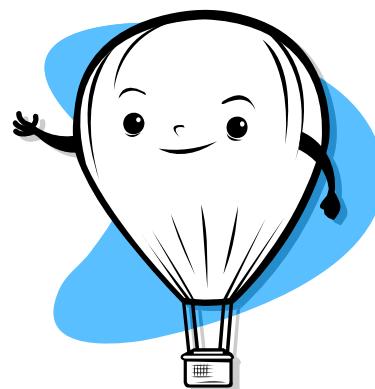
Well, a little stress is okay—everyone feels stress at one time or another. Let's face it; tests can cause LOTS of stress. Here are some reasons kids tense up when they hear the "T" word:

- Many children feel pressure from adults to perform well. They want to please their parents and teachers and worry about disappointing them.
- Students feel nervous when their familiar classroom settings are changed, like when the volume changes from the "normal" classroom sounds to very quiet, or if the room has been rearranged for testing.
- Some students get upset when they are tested in unfamiliar surroundings or with someone they don't know well.
- Some kids are worried about how their test results might affect their school.

- **That's so much pressure! How can I help?**

I'm glad you asked. First and foremost, keep the lines of communication open with your child's school. Find out what you can do at home to support your child. Second, always encourage a good night's sleep and a healthy breakfast on the day of the test. Studies show that a well-rested, well-nourished child learns better. Next, try to be positive. Show your child that you are confident in his abilities. Find a healthy balance in emphasizing that you want him to do his best, but no matter what, you'll be proud of the effort he made. Make it clear that no matter what the results are, you'll love him just the same.

Parents and Teachers alike should remember that children can sense your attitude toward the testing process and are likely to copy your behaviors. That's why it's so important that you **STAY POSITIVE!**



- **Is there something else I can do?**

Yes. Try to make studying fun--or at least bearable--for your child. Take breaks when needed, and try to squeeze in activities that your child enjoys--like figuring a major league baseball player's batting average when studying averages. It's also a great idea to get some exercise during breaks. Just like eating and sleeping well, studies show that physical activity stimulates the brain for learning to take place.

Avoid talking about the test more than necessary in front of your child. Remember, tests aren't everything. You can share stories with your child about challenges you've overcome in the past. You can also help by teaching him some stress-relieving tips.

- **Any suggestions?**

Sure. How about counting to ten slowly, taking deep breaths, tensing and relaxing tight muscles, or squeezing a stress ball? I know adults who take a short walk, stand and stretch, or close their eyes and imagine being in their favorite place. This works for kids, too.

- **Thanks! I'll keep these ideas in mind when my children take tests-especially the MAP tests!**



Successful Test Taking Tips

- **Other than the stress-taming strategies, how else can I help my child succeed on tests?**

There are many ways to help. Again, always communicate with your child's school and teachers. It's very important that your child attend school regularly—unless, of course, he or she is sick. Missing even one day could mean missing out on skills and knowledge that will last a lifetime.

Practice reading every day. You can read to your children, or have them read to you, as often as possible. Books, newspapers, magazines, recipes and even credits on the television screen or the back of a cereal box are all handy tools for reading. The only way to practice reading is by reading!

Point out natural ways to use math in daily life—such as in baking or shopping for groceries.

Help your child get organized and stay that way! Point out a comfortable time and place to do homework, and encourage her to stick with a schedule.

Help your child understand different types of questions. Find the sample questions at <http://www.coe.missouri.edu/~map/mapcd/> or released items at http://dese.mo.gov/divimprove/assess/Released_Items/riarchiveindex.html. Use them to help your child identify different kinds of questions, such as:

- Which item does not belong?
- Which statement is NOT true?
- Describe the best route to take to school. Explain why you chose that route.
- What was the problem in this passage, and how was the problem resolved?

Work with your student on “restating the question.” This simple skill helps the child to show understanding of what is asked. For example, if you asked, “What is your name?” The child's answer should be, “My name is Pam.” When asked, “How old are you?” a student should respond with, “I am ten years old,” rather than a one-word answer like, “Ten.” When faced with test questions like, “Compare and contrast apples and oranges,” or “How are apples and oranges alike, and how are they different?” students have a better chance of earning all points possible by identifying each. “Apples and oranges are alike because both are fruits that grow on trees. They are different because apples come in many different colors, and oranges are the color orange. Oranges are different because they have a thicker peeling than apples and the pieces come in segments.” This identifying answer is much different than saying, “One is orange and the other isn't. They are fruits.”

Use vocabulary words that your child is likely to see on a test so she is familiar with and understands them. Words like describe, explain, interpret, define, details, examples, compare, and contrast are often seen on tests.

Discuss the process of elimination. If she doesn't know the correct answer, have her work in reverse, mentally removing answers that she knows do not belong. Try to choose the best answer from those remaining.

- **How can my child help herself in preparing for tests?**

You and your child's teachers should encourage her to approach the test with a positive attitude and to keep the following tips in mind.

- Carefully listen to or read directions. It's okay to ask questions if you don't understand the directions.
- Read the entire question or problem. Be sure you understand the question before giving an answer, being careful to notice words like "not" or "never" or "all of the above."
- Take notice of special headings or pictures on the page. These may give clues to help answer the questions.
- Go back and check answers if you have time. Even the best test-takers skip questions or make simple mistakes.
- As tempting as it may be, never try to get answers from another student's test. First of all, the test is created for you to show what YOU know. Second, the penalty for cheating can be severe. Finally, there is no way of knowing that the student's answers are correct.
- Understand that some sections of a test will take longer than others. For example, when you have to read a story and answer questions, there is usually plenty of time allotted. It's okay if you don't remember all the answers; you can look back at the story and skim through it to find the answers you need.
- Wear comfortable clothes.
- Be prepared with extra pencils and erasers, just in case.
- If you don't know an answer to a question, skip it and come back to it later. You don't want to spend too much time on questions you don't know.
- Think positive thoughts!

You can find more tips by doing an Internet search for "Test Taking Tips." There are also many books available on test taking skills. Just remember, as your child's primary caregiver, you can be a great help to her in preparing for tests.

- **Thank you! You've given me lots to think about. Any last thoughts?**

Just remember that communication and a positive attitude are important. If you have questions, don't hesitate to ask school personnel or contact the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education.