

ALLIANCE FOR CHILDHOOD

Tips for Parents: When Kindergarten Testing Is Out of Hand

Facts About Testing You Should Know

The No Child Left Behind law requires standardized tests in public schools starting in third grade. Pressure to raise scores has led many schools to begin testing in kindergarten. But tests given to children younger than 8 often produce misleading results. Young children can't sit and concentrate for long. They may not understand the questions or what is expected of them. And their performance is affected by anxiety, hunger, fatigue, and stress. Because of this, the odds that a test at the kindergarten level will give inaccurate results are about 50-50—the same odds as flipping a coin. (Reference: NAEYC)

Relying on standardized tests to make important decisions about a young child's education violates professional standards and National Academy of Sciences recommendations. Test scores should not determine whether children are placed in special education or gifted and talented programs. Focusing on tests also leads schools to pay less attention to things that are very important but hard to measure, like play skills, self-control, cooperation, physical development, creativity, and love of learning.

Many educators oppose testing of young children but don't speak out against it because they may be accused of being against rigor and "accountability." Academic pressure in kindergarten has not produced better results. On the contrary, experts believe it contributes to failure, retention, and behavior problems.

How You Can Help Your Child

- If you see signs of anxiety that may be related to testing, be reassuring and encouraging—and talk to the teacher about ways to reduce test-related stress.
- Make sure your child gets plenty of sleep and a good breakfast on testing day.
- Tell your child that tests do not measure how smart, able, or good a person is.
- Consider requesting that your kindergartner not be tested for the reasons given above.

What You Can Do to Change the System

- Talk to your child's teacher and principal about excessive testing. You may find they agree with you and will work with you to make changes.
- Talk to other parents about their experiences and observations. Work together to educate the community about the limitations and risks of testing young children.
- Ask the PTA or other parents' groups to organize a meeting on early childhood education and alternatives to standardized tests, such as observation and work-based assessments.
- Find out if there is a district policy on the testing of young children. Ask that policies be adopted in line with professional recommendations on testing children under age 8.
- Talk to your pediatrician about the importance of play for healthy child development and how stressful school experiences affect children. Ask him/her to get involved.
- Write a letter to the editor, or post a comment on the school web site or a parenting blog.
- Get support from early childhood specialists at a nearby university or from the state or local chapter of the National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC).

For more information, see *Crisis in the Kindergarten: Why Children Need to Play in School* at www.allianceforchildhood.org