

Talking to Your Children About Assessments

Schools use assessments to monitor student mastery of and growth in achievement of curriculum standards. Assessments are used for much more than calculating a grade, so it is important for both parents and students to understand the types of assessments given and what the results mean. Equally important is that parents and students celebrate areas of accomplishment and recognize the need to continue to grow in other areas.

Below are some tips parents might consider discussing with their students:

- Let your child know that you are proud of his/her achievements and together you will work on any skills or concepts where the student struggles. It is important for students to know that even if the overall score is not at a proficient level, there are specific skills where the student performed well. This will also assist students in going beyond the “label” (proficient, basic, etc.) in reflecting on their own performance.
- Learn about the type of assessments the classroom teacher is using to monitor your child’s progress in mastering the skills and concepts being taught. Classroom assessments tend to be shorter assessments that are tied directly to the instruction that is occurring. Teachers use these assessments primarily to monitor that students are understanding the instruction and to intervene early if they notice signs of student difficulty.
- Learn about the type of assessments the district and state are using to measure the achievement of your child. These types of assessments are usually benchmark or summative assessments. The purpose of these assessments is frequently to measure long term mastery of concepts and skills as opposed to day-to-day instruction.
- Look at both the level of mastery of the concepts and skills as well as your child’s growth in achievement since the last time that the assessment was given. Sometimes students have not yet reached proficiency, but they have made a significant amount of growth. Recognize this growth with your child to reinforce that the efforts to learn are paying off.
- Find the school, district, or state website for information on the state assessments. Samples of previous assessment items may also be found at the website, as well as the standards being assessed. Review of these items and standards can give you a clearer picture of exactly what your child is expected to know and be able to do on the state assessments.
- Be familiar with the terms used on the test (such as *proficient*, *percentile*, and *norm-referenced*) and be prepared to ask what those terms mean when talking with the classroom teacher, counselor, or principal.
- If needed, schedule a meeting with the teacher to discuss your child’s test results. Conferences are an excellent time to discuss student test results and any intervention or enrichment needs.
- Ask your child’s teacher for tips and ideas about working with your child at home. Are there specific materials or online resources available that will help your child improve? Are there particular reading, writing, or math strategies that can be reinforced at home?
- Create a plan with the teacher to periodically check on your child’s progress in areas of need.

U.S. Department of Education - <http://www.ed.gov/blog/2014/03/taking-time-to-talk-with-your-child-about-tests/>