



## SAMPLER

### Help Parents Understand School Tests and Assessments

**When parents know about school tests,  
More children will be able to do their best.  
Good partnerships will help ensure  
That students learn and test scores soar.**

In schools across America, tests are used to measure student learning and growth in skills and abilities. Classroom tests and standardized tests are the mainstay of all schools. Classroom tests are periodic exams that check students' understanding and skills taught in math, science, spelling, reading, or other subjects. Standardized tests are, usually, annual assessments taken by all students at particular grade levels throughout a district or state.

Good tests measure students' knowledge and mastery of curricular content. Good teachers use creative instructional approaches in classwork, homework, and projects to help students learn skills and meet expected standards. Students also learn test-taking strategies to reduce anxieties about how to approach various kinds of test questions.

Teachers and parents want their children to do well on tests—as do the students, themselves. Lost in many discussions about tests is the fact that targeted school, family, and community partnership practices can help boost students' skills and attitudes. Communications between school and home about assessments can help parents understand the curriculum, the purpose of tests that are administered, and how to support student learning and attitudes about exams.

Standardized tests sometimes are used to measure school and teacher effectiveness. That is, the scores of students in all schools in a district or state may be reported to inform parents and the public of the relative standing of schools by subject and grade level. Recently—and not without controversy—tests have been used in some locations to evaluate individual teachers' success in increasing student achievement.

It is in everyone's best interest for families and communities to understand state and district standards for student learning, and to know how tests measure the attainment of those standards. It also is very important for families and students to

understand the results of tests, and what the scores mean for students' progress and next steps. By sharing this information, teachers enable more parents to discuss schoolwork with their children, help students practice skills (e.g., spelling words, math computation), encourage students to study for tests, and develop positive attitudes about taking exams.

The activities in this *Sampler* were selected from books of *Promising Partnership Practices* over the years and across grade levels. The ten activities describe different ways that schools inform families about tests and engage parents and students in discussions about various assessments. Readers can gather ideas on how to increase parents' comfort and knowledge about the tests their children take, how to help children prepare for tests, how access a Parent Portal to check on students' progress, and how to interpret reports sent home. Because classroom tests are given every year and standardized tests are administered in targeted grade levels, teachers' connection with parents about tests is an on-going process.

### Enrich Classroom Teaching

Effective teachers motivate students to do their best on classroom and standardized tests. They also share information with families to enable them to support their children's work and test taking. Individual teachers may adopt or adapt activities in this *Sampler* to strengthen partnerships with their own students' families.

For example, teachers at any grade level may adapt Computer Connection to help their students' parents use the Parent Portal to keep track of test scores, attendance, and other data. Grade-level teams of teachers may conduct Explore Test Information Parent Night to explain specific tests and help parents understand their child's scores.

See more activities in *Promising Partnership Practices* at [www.partnershipschools.org](http://www.partnershipschools.org) in Success Stories.

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## Review of Research Family Involvement and School Tests

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There are no specific studies of whether practices that inform parents about the purposes and results of specific school tests have measurable effects on children's test scores. Instead, it is necessary to apply results of hundreds of studies that confirm the importance of two-way communications between school and home for increasing student success in school (Jeynes, 2005). Logically, family and school connections about the tests that students take should help more parents guide their children's studying, learning, and attitudes about tests (McWilliams & Patton, 2015).

**Parents have the right and need to know.** School, district, state, and federal policies recognize parents' need for information about their own children's schooling and how to help at home from preschool through high school. This includes information on their child's classwork, progress, and test scores in clear terms and understandable language. Many useful resources are available to help parents understand school tests and assessments. For example, the *PBS Frontline Testing Our Schools: A Guide for Parents* (Beaupré, 2002) outlines basic information on typical school tests, what they measure, how to interpret results, and how to discuss these topics at home with their children.

Many states have adopted high standards for student learning and posted them on their websites for parents to see what their children are expected to learn at each grade level. States also selected one of two major computer-adaptive standardized tests to measure how well students attain *Common Core State Standards: PARCC* and *Smarter Balanced Assessment*. Both tests' websites offer practice tests for parents and students to see how the tests work on a computer, and to encourage practice on items like those on the tests on critical thinking, writing, and problem solving skills. Also see a *Fact Sheet for Parents* (2014) from Smarter Balanced Assessments.

Good tests do more than yield a "score." They measure skills and progress, and put scores in context so that teachers and parents can discuss actions needed to help students maintain or improve skills over the school year.

**On-Line Connections.** Many districts and schools have expanded communications to share data with parents by using new technologies. For example, on-line Parent Portals give parents easy access to information on student attendance, report card grades, homework, test scores, and other student records. Most parents need information and training to access these portals and to interpret the information.

**Test anxiety.** Studies have been conducted on ways to reduce students' test anxieties, particularly math anxiety. Most students worry about some tests, but some students have more serious physical and psychological reactions to tests that prevent them from doing their best. A few studies have explored the role parents play in increasing or reducing test anxieties (McLeod, Wood, & Weisz, 2007; Vukovic, Roberts, & Wright, 2013). In general, results indicate that children's test and math anxieties may be reduced if teachers and parents work together to provide positive support, activities, and expectations for student learning and achievement. The path of influence flows from positive parental involvement to students' attitudes and behaviors (e.g., lower test anxiety) to higher achievement.

**Non-test measures.** In addition to formal tests, there are other "non-test" measures of student progress. Parents need to know about the multiple measures that teachers use to gauge students' skills and talents (Darling-Hammond & Falk, 2013). These include classwork, homework completion, portfolios of collected works, reports, presentations, and group and individual performance-based projects. Teachers also may measure students' participation in class, leadership, and attendance to assign report card grades and to determine student success in school. Although standardized tests are considered more *objective* than these ratings, multiple measures of students' knowledge may be informative for teachers, motivating for students, and important to parents (Furger and Cronin, 2014).

**Summary.** Research confirms that family engagement is important for student learning and development. NNPS guides educators to use research-based approaches to implement goal-linked practices that increase student learning, test scores, and success in school (Epstein et al., 2009). It is expected that strong programs of school, family, and community partnerships will inform and engage parents in ways that help students do their best on tests.

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### Also see:

- PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers. <http://www.parcconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes> and Smarter Balanced Assessments. <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/about/>
- Council of the Great City Schools. Parent Roadmaps to Common Core Standards: English and Mathematics <http://www.cgcs.org/Page/330>



# BREAKFAST FOR CHAMPIONS

**WESTGATE ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
KENNEWICK, WA**

**F**or students at Westgate Elementary, cultural diversity is part of the culture: 22 different languages are spoken as first languages in students' homes. This ensures many opportunities to learn about others, but many families that are new to the country are unfamiliar with U.S. schools. They seek assistance in many areas, one of which is how to help their children prepare for standardized tests. At Breakfast for Champions, over 100 students and parents came together to share food for breakfast and food for thought.

When Breakfast for Champions opened at 7:30 a.m., students, parents, and some other family members signed in with teachers' assistance, helped themselves to donuts donated by local grocery stores, and looked at students' posters hanging around the gym. Students had worked with the school counselor to create recipes for "Smart Cookies" on the posters. The math specialist created posters with released math test items that showed students' work.

At 7:45 a.m., the principal welcomed everyone. He shared a PowerPoint presentation explaining what tests the children would be taking, test dates, how the school used test results, and how parents could encourage children to perform at their best. From 8:00-8:15 a.m., parents talked with their child's teacher, visited with other families, and picked up a card with information on getting their children to school on time and well-prepared on test days.

Parents filled out cards of encouragement for their children. The cards were donated by a local drugstore, labeled with every student's name in grades 3-5, alphabetized by classroom, and placed on grade-level tables. Clipboards were available for parents to complete their cards and return them to the baskets. One parent said, "The cards of encouragement were a great idea. Now [my children] know that I'm thinking about them during the test."

For students whose families were unable to attend, a staff member or Homework Center volunteer filled out an encouragement card, ensuring that every student received a positive message on the first day of testing.

Breakfast for Champions modified Muffins for Moms/Donuts for Dads by featuring useful information for parents. This year, the school invited moms and dads of students in grades 3-5 and provided information on math skills and state tests. Parents also were offered strategies to support their children's test taking.

To overcome the language barrier, headsets were available for Spanish translations. Para-educators contacted many Somali families and the ATP worked with community members who had ties to other cultural groups. Interpreters also were available at the Breakfast. The ATP encouraged teachers to call at least five families and personally invite them to Breakfast for Champions.

One teacher reported that, "It was wonderful to see so many cultures represented at this event." In the future, even more is planned to welcome all families. The ATP hopes to print invitations in English and Spanish and to have translation headsets for Spanish, Somali, and Burmese families.

With more and better information about state tests, it is hoped that more parents will support their children's learning and more students will demonstrate that they are test-taking champions.

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# COMPUTER CONNECTION

## HIGHLANDS MIDDLE SCHOOL

KENNEWICK, WA

When students know that their families have access to their grades and attendance records, they become more responsible about schoolwork. That is why Highlands Middle School's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) wanted more students' families, including those of English Language Learners (ELL), to understand the school's grading system and to know how to monitor their own child's grades and progress. At Computer Connection, parents learned computer literacy skills and how to follow their children's grades online.

Computer Connection was conducted as two workshops for parents. The first session helped all parents to open an e-mail account that they could use for general communications with teachers and others at school. The second session focused on the PowerSchool Parent Portal. To encourage attendance at both sessions, childcare and light dinner were provided at no cost.

At the first session, teachers and counselors presented a PowerPoint in English and Spanish on the steps to set up a gmail account. Parents were given a folder, note pad, and pen. Print copies of the presentation were available to families who attended the workshop and those who could not attend. ATP members, counselors, and the afterschool Coordinator attended to provide assistance as needed.

The second session offered one-on-one tutoring by teachers with parents on how to use the PowerSchool Parent Portal to access their own child's grades and other important school information. Each family's questions were addressed. The goal was for all families to be able—and eager—to sign on, understand the information on the Portal, and feel comfortable using all sections. The ATP and planning group recognized that many parents came to the session with minimal computer skills. This situation was best addressed with the one-to-one ratio of instructors to

participants at the workshop on the Parent Portal.

To assist parents who needed childcare, Highlands brought in four members of its 21st Century after-school staff and four middle school student volunteers to take care of younger children in one section of the library. The childcare group was given a variety of puzzles, play dough, card games, and coloring supplies for age-appropriate activities in a safe and interactive environment.

After each workshop, parents and children were invited to join Highlands' staff and volunteers for a light dinner of sandwiches, chips, fruit, and water in the cafeteria. This gave parents and teachers time to meet, hear about the afterschool program from the Coordinator, and review questions about gmail, the Parent Portal, and other computer skills. Costs for food and childcare activities were covered by the afterschool program.

To prepare for the Computer Connection sessions, teachers developed lesson plans and presentations, advertised the classes with their students, and placed phone calls to parents who might benefit most from the workshops. The afterschool coordinator created a flyer, and the ATP posted it on the school's Facebook page, reader board, and in other bulletins.

In many schools, there is a digital divide between parents who are computer savvy and those who have limited internet access and computer skills. With Computer Connection, Highlands Middle School found one way to begin to address this challenge.

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# DONUTS AND DATA WITH DAD

SUNSET MIDDLE SCHOOL

SUNSET, LA

**R**ecord-breaking cold weather did not deter 80 parents from heading to Sunset Middle School one morning last winter to learn about the new Common Core State Standards. What were the standards? What do they mean for student learning? How can parents help their children meet the academic goals for the year? These were a few questions on parents' minds.

The school's Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) made a special effort to boost participation by fathers and other father-figures in students' lives by calling the Common Core meeting Donuts and Data with Dad. Mothers, grandparents, and others were welcome to attend. The title helped—mostly dads and other male role models for students attended the breakfast meeting.

The ATP publicized Donuts and Data with Dad in several ways. Students were given flyers to take home with a section for families to RSVP. An announcement was placed in the Community Events section of the local newspaper. Text message reminders were sent to parents using the school's automated communication system. The ATP believed that this publicity-package would help many parents make time to attend the breakfast meeting. Coffee, hot chocolate, and donuts were served.

At the school, dads and other family members were greeted by ten ATP members and 15 teachers. They socialized and enjoyed breakfast, and received information prepared by the school's Instructional Specialist. The handouts were personalized for each family, and included the student's test scores in language arts, math, science, and social studies from 2013 and the target for improving skills for the upcoming state test in the spring of 2014. Families appreciated receiving information specific to their children.

The school Parent Educator and principal welcomed everyone, and shared an overview of the Common Core State Standards. Parents were curious. Information outlined what students at each grade level should know and be able to do in specific subjects. The Instructional Specialist explained how the curriculum and teachers' instructional methods would help students meet the standards. The Science Coordinator explained specific curricular changes. The presenters also shared strategies that parents could use at home to support their child's learning. "This was great information," said a dad.

The district's Supervisor of School Choice and Accountability attended and was pleased by the number of parents at the breakfast. She thanked them for participating and praised the school for the academic advances its students made in the past few years. Sunset Middle School, she reported, with about 70% of students eligible for free or reduced-price lunch, had been named a "Top Gains School" in St. Landry Parish. After the presentations, family members were encouraged to visit their students in their classrooms.

Donuts and Data with Dad was a great way to strengthen the connections of educators with families. Dads, moms, and others gained a clear sense of what their students needed to achieve in the upcoming months and were ready to help them reach these goals. As students move through the middle grades, all parents will need information on Common Core State Standards and how to work as partners with teachers to help students advance their skills.

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# EXPLORE TEST INFORMATION PARENT NIGHT

## WASHINGTON JUNIOR HIGH SCHOOL NAPERVILLE, IL

**P**arents need information to understand the whys, hows, and whats of the 8th grade standardized tests. The School, Family, Community Partnership Teams at Jefferson, Kennedy, and Washington Junior High Schools took on this challenge. Each school designed and implemented an Explore Test Information Parent Night to orient parents to the *EXPLORE* test, which was in its second year of use in the Naperville School District. The evening's agenda aimed to explain the test, share information on how test results were used by the school and district, and enable parents to interpret their own child's test scores. At the conclusion of each meeting, parents were given a copy of their child's test results.

At Kennedy and Jefferson Junior High Schools the evening was called A Night to *EXPLORE*. A district staff member provided an overview of the test, described what each section measured, gave examples of how the students' scores were interpreted, and addressed parents' questions. After the introductory session, parents were divided into small groups, based on the high school their children would attend. They received information on how *EXPLORE* scores and other criteria affected students' placements in some high school programs, subjects, and classes. School leaders demonstrated the Turning Point Technology that students use in their assessments. Parents learned-by-doing. They used the technology to participate in a survey at the end of the program.

At Washington Junior High School, the principal welcomed parents and discussed the evening's agenda. Presenters who were experts on the *EXPLORE* test shared information with the group. The first speaker was an administrator from one of the high schools that the 8th grade students would attend. He discussed how the test results would be used by the high school staff to help students develop paths of study.

He also discussed how students would be helped to prepare for the ACT college entrance exam. The second speaker was a district administrator who explained more about the purpose of the *EXPLORE* test and how parents could interpret their own child's scores.

Valuable lessons were learned by the SFCP teams as well as by parents at the *EXPLORE* Test Information Parent Night. Jefferson had a larger turnout than expected, with over 150 parents attending. The team leaders plan to arrange more space next year and have multiple stations for parents to sign in. They also will sort students' tests alphabetically and at letter-grouped tables around the room to streamline the distribution of individual student's scores to parents.

All three SFCP teams were pleased with the results of their meetings on the *EXPLORE* tests. They believe that eighth grade students benefit when their parents have good information about the tests they take and the courses they select in high school. Knowledgeable parents can discuss these topics with their teens, guide their decisions in high school, and support their students' academic success. As the principal of Kennedy Junior High noted, "The evening provides a good opportunity for parents to receive a big picture view of how students' data can inform their decisions going from middle school to high school." As parents explored the *EXPLORE* test, they gained important information and ideas to help their teens make a successful transition to high school.

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Type 2

OTHER SUBJECTS

# FAMILIARIZING FAMILIES WITH PARCC

SUNSET MIDDLE SCHOOL  
SUNSET, LOUISIANA

TYPE 1

**C**onfused about what students' standardized test data actually mean? You are not alone. Most families are not sure how to interpret test results. The Action Team for Partnerships (ATP), teachers, and parents at Sunset Middle School in the St. Landry School District in Louisiana set to work to help all parents and students understand test scores. The school includes grades 5-8 with a racially diverse student body.

To support the school improvement goal of working with parents as partners, the partnership team has conducted meetings for parents about student data for several years. This year's meeting focused explicitly on the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) tests that measure students' progress on learning standards in English Language Arts and Math at each grade level. This was Sunset Middle School's first year receiving results on the PARCC assessments, which made it imperative to guide parents in analyzing the reports they receive on their own child's scores and summaries of data on the school as a whole.

To encourage parents to attend the workshop, the partnership team conducted a broad advertising campaign with flyers sent home and posted in the community and messages on cell phones through the Remind101 service. The invitations outlined the main topic for understanding PARCC scores, and noted that refreshments and door prizes would be provided.

The workshop for parents entitled, "Getting Families Familiar with PARCC Student Results" was held in the fall when test scores were available. About 75 parents, 50 students, and 25 teachers attended (approximately 1 in 7 school families). Students who attended with a parent were rewarded with a free dress day. This was a good start for familiarizing students' parents to a new test program.

The group was greeted by the school's parent educator and the principal discussed current testing procedures in Louisiana. She provided background information on testing, educational goals for Louisiana students, and an overview of the PARCC assessment.

With well-prepared information, attendees were guided through a sample report of the PARCC test scores. Then, they were divided into small groups to review their own child's score report. Teachers and administrators circulated among the groups to answer parents' questions and provide assistance, as needed. One teacher saw the light bulb go on for the parents, "I loved seeing the look on parent's faces when we explained all of the different areas on which students are tested." Parents echoed the emerging understanding. In a typical reaction, one parent expressed how she moved from knowing very little about PARCC to feeling informed, "Things sure have changed since I was in school. I'm so glad we attended [the meeting]. Now, I finally understand what all of these numbers mean."

Parents were urged to take the information home and to review it with their children. Middle grade students benefit when parents understand testing and can discuss the results that are reported in a complex report. Parents benefit, too, by understanding their child's academic strengths and areas that need more attention during the school year.

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OTHER/MULTIPLE SUBJECTS

# MID-YEAR PARENT BREAKFASTS

## ALPS ROAD ELEMENTARY SCHOOL ATHENS, GEORGIA

**T**he Action Team at Alps Road Elementary School gave families something to chew on at the Mid-Year Parent Breakfasts. The school year begins in August with grade-level Parent Breakfasts. This year, school leaders decided to add Mid-Year Parent Breakfasts so that parents could see their children's academic progress.

Each grade level held a breakfast for parents on a different morning, from 8-9 a.m. during February and March. These sessions gave parents an overview of the Georgia Performance Standards, Criterion-Referenced Competency Tests (CRCT), and the implications of the standards and tests for their child. Family members gained an understanding of what standards-based testing involved and how to support learning at home.

Staff served breakfast—chicken biscuit, juice, fruit, and coffee for parents—in the pod outside each classroom, complete with white linen tablecloths, glass plates, and colorful napkins. Parents and children ate at desks in the classroom. “The children thoroughly enjoyed letting their parents know what they are working on and what was necessary for them to meet and exceed standards,” one teacher explained.

The children, themselves, presented all of the curriculum and testing information. Each student was responsible for introducing their parent to the class. Selected students read short scripts describing specific curriculum standards, testing information, grade-level newsletters, and home-based enrichment programs.

As the principal noted, “The Mid-Year Parent Breakfasts were one of the best ideas we implemented this year. They forced us to stop and see where each child was on the path to the next grade level. They also provided an opportunity for honest conversations by the child, the teacher, and the parent about their progress. They gave children the opportunity to see what they needed to do to reach their goals. Having the children

explain their paths to their parents took it to a whole new level.”

Two weeks before the breakfast, teachers sent individual invitations to each family in both in English and Spanish. The day before the event, children left school with a sticker on their jackets as an added reminder. These publicity efforts paid off as 165 parents participated in these breakfasts.

The Counselor and Instructional Coach prepared teachers and students the week prior to the breakfasts. This included having the teacher select students to present the information, helping students with their scripts, and providing practice time.

Staff at Alps Road Elementary agreed that the parent breakfasts were well worth the \$160 price tag. As one parent raved, “I like the children presenting as it helps them feel more confident about taking the tests. They are more connected to the decision making process and know what they have to do to make the transition to the next grade level.”

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Type 2

OTHER OR MULTIPLE SUBJECTS



# PARCC AND PASTRIES / AFTERNOON IN THE PARCC

**NORTHEAST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL / GRAND COTEAU ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
OPELOUSAS, LA / GRAND COTEAU, LA (ST. LANDRY PARISH)**

**T**est anxiety can strike all students—even the most confident learners. St. Landry district leaders are guiding schools to help parents support their children in achieving new learning standards that will be measured by a new test—PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers). Grand Coteau Elementary School and Northeast Elementary School introduced parents to state standards in literacy and math, questions on PARCC, and ways to support student learning and reduce test anxiety.

After school from 3-5 p.m., Grand Coteau invited parents and students to a learn-and-do session—Afternoon in the PARCC—to increase their understanding of the standards, the curricular and instructional approaches teachers use in class, and sample test questions for third and fourth graders. Parents met with the Parent Resource Coordinator, principal, third- and fourth-grade teachers, and the district’s K-12 math specialist.

The educators walked parents through the major standards in math and English language arts (ELA) and sample PARCC items on these standards. In addition to clarifying the state standards, school curricula, and test items, they also shared several strategies to help parents support their children’s learning at home. Parents asked questions and discussed their concerns.

Parents who attended Afternoon in the PARCC received door prizes. Students received goodie bags of school supplies, including a dictionary, thesaurus, two folders, pack of pencils, pencil sharpener, glue stick, ruler, highlighter, scissors, and calculator. These items were purchased with parental involvement funds allocated by the school district.

At Northeastern Elementary’s PARCC and Pastries, parents of students in grades 3-6 met one morning with the Parent Educator and an instructional specialist for breakfast and an informational PowerPoint. The presentation

explained state standards and sections of the PARCC test, including literary analysis, research simulation, and narrative tasks in language arts. Parents were given a chance to solve math examples and to consider how they would help their children doing similar problems for homework.

Parents received handouts listing the schedule of tests, frequently asked questions, sample test questions, and websites for test strategies and examples that they may use with their children at home. These included guiding parents to encourage their children to read and discuss stories and non-fiction informational text materials. The parents completed surveys to give their input and feedback on how well the session addressed their questions and gave them ideas on how to support their child’s learning. One parent commented, “I did not know what to expect with PARCC until I attended this meeting.”

Refreshments were served at both schools’ events. The information sessions gave parents opportunities to meet their children’s teachers and other school and district leaders, along with other parents. Common parent reviews were: “Very informative.” “Very helpful.” “Very knowledgeable staff.”

St. Landry’s educators know that parents and family can be important influences in preparing students for annual tests. The PARCC information sessions at these and other schools (see PARCC and Pastries for Parents at Sunset Middle School in this section) are helping parents understand what is expected of students in class and how they can support and guide their child’s learning at home.

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## Partners in Testing

*Cherokee Heights West Side School of Excellence  
St. Paul, Minnesota*

Families awarded school administrators at Cherokee Heights West Side School of Excellence high scores for a new test preparation program developed for parents and students. Their Partners in Testing program united 90 parents and 40 school teachers in their quest for higher math and reading results on the Minnesota state assessment.

Members of the school's Action Team for Partnership (ATP) brainstormed the idea to increase parental awareness of testing requirements for grades 3-6. Many students in those grades were either just below or just above meeting state standards. ATP members hoped that a few extra-help sessions for students and their families would help increase test preparation at home and students' success on the tests.

ATP members promoted the events through the school's own morning news network and through a series of fliers sent home with students. They also publicized the sessions in classroom newsletters and with personalized phone calls home to parents. Though the event targeted students in grades 3-6, the school invited families from all grade levels to attend the sessions.

Teachers appointed to lead the sessions took time to develop lesson plans that emphasized math and literacy skills. The lessons included hands-on activities and taught test-related skills using common household items such as newspapers, dominoes, and playing cards to motivate and teach students.

The ATP scheduled sessions for five nights between January and March. About 75 students and 90 parents participated at one or more events. At the beginning of every session, each parent received a folder at the door, full of materials relevant to the evening's presentation, including vocabulary lists and multiplication tables. The folders' contents varied by grade level, and volunteers distributed the folders to parent-child pairs.

The ATP divided the evening into three 45 minute activities. Parents and students spent the night alternating between math and reading activities, such as Basic Skills with Dice Games, Phonics with Everyday Products, and Learning from Dominoes and Flashcards. At the end of each session, instructors distributed free materials from each game so that families could continue the fun and learning at home.

School administrators recruited several bilingual education assistants to translate the sessions for Hispanic and Hmong families. Perhaps the biggest challenge for the ATP was making sure that all families understood the contents of their folders. Although some teachers had translated their activities into Spanish beforehand, Hmong translations were not always available. For that reason, translators worked very hard to explain the lessons and activities during the sessions, resulting in quite animated conversations throughout the evening.

The event cost the school \$400 to conduct. Administrators used Title I funds to cover expenses. The ATP plans to host the event again next year. They will begin the sessions earlier in the year so that students will have more opportunities to practice their skills prior to the state tests that are administered in the spring.

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## SPRING INTO LEAP

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NORTHEAST ELEMENTARY SCHOOL  
OPELOUSAS, LOUISIANA

TYPE 4

**H**igh-stakes testing is a charged subject, but, like it or not, the tests are true to their word—they are high stakes. School funding, public perception of school quality, and targeted areas for school improvement are all connected to test scores. Northeast Elementary School knows that students should be well prepared to take the state tests that are important for them and for their school. Good preparation breeds confidence and success. Northeast Elementary also knows that it is important to empower families to understand and support the Louisiana Educational Assessment Program (LEAP) tests that their children take.

The ATP, teachers, and administrators at Northeast invited parents and students to school for an information session—Spring into LEAP—to learn the basics of the annual spring tests and how to help their children at home. Teachers in grades 3-6 shared sample questions from past English Language Arts and Math tests with the group to show the content that had been covered in class and the kinds of questions and formats that students were likely to encounter.

Parents and students were asked to review one problem each day so that the student could practice a skill taught in class. Parents were able to use some of the test taking tips they learned at the information session. It was expected that by talking over the sample problems and showing a parent how they do their work, students would gain confidence about their readiness to take the tests. The principal told parents that if they were uncertain about the content of a question or ran

out of samples to share with their child, they could call or meet with teachers during their planning period.

The information session at school was well attended by almost 200 parents and as many students. This can be attributed to two things. First, the topic was of inherent interest to families and students, who really want to do their best on tests. Second, advertising for the meeting was extensive, including the usual communications from school to home and advertising Spring into LEAP on the radio. Parents were encouraged to invite other parents to the event. Those in attendance were encouraged to share the information and take home materials with parents who were not able to attend.

Teachers reported that their students were benefitting academically and behaviorally by practicing skills in class and at home. The impact of extra practice was evident on students' weekly assessments and daily work in class. The extra practice at home reassured many students, who were calm and confident on test day. Parents also felt calmer about the tests their children were taking. One parent had been anxious about the high stakes linked to the state tests, but felt better after the information session at school. She said, "My mind is at ease after attending this workshop."

OTHER/MULTIPLE SUBJECTS

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# WKCE NIGHT

## EDISON MIDDLE SCHOOL JANESVILLE, WI

Standardized tests are familiar to all students, but their parents do not always know what the tests are about or how test scores are used. At WKCE Night at Edison Middle School, parents learned about the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Evaluation (WKCE) and how to help their children do their best on the test—while having some fun.

WKCE Night was conducted about a week before the test was administered. Parents were guided to the school cafeteria. A buffet lined the perimeter of the room with nutritious food, including dried fruit, trail mix, and turkey hot dogs, along with information on nutrition.

Educational stations were set up where students and parents could eat, learn, and work on test-related activities. Members of the Action Team for Partnerships (ATP) presented a WKCE PowerPoint on the test originally shown to students, but tailored for parents in English and Spanish. Stations included: a table for parents to write encouraging notes that their children would receive on test day; a Literacy Connection table; a “Stump the Student” station with puzzles for students; sample test materials; and tips on how to help students the night before the test. Prizes were raffled off at the end of the night.

Thanks to community support, Edison Middle School only had to provide the materials on testing and the communications to advertise WKCE Night. Four local businesses donated nutritious food, information on nutrition, and raffle prizes. The school Builder’s Club provided childcare for very young children. Edison’s students helped set up and clean up the room. Some helped care for their younger siblings.

At WKCE Night, students explained the state test to their parents and discussed the challenges they face in preparing for and taking the test. Take-home test packets enabled parents to practice test-related items with their children at home. One parent expressed her satisfaction,

saying, “WKCE Night was beautifully done. It really helped me understand the test and curriculum my child is learning.”

WKCE Night required good planning by the ATP, teachers, and administrators, and strengthened partnerships between educators, parents, and students. The administration approved the schedule and use of the building about a month in advance. An ATP representative attended team teacher meetings to garner support, get ideas from teachers, and secure teacher volunteers to talk with parents and students at the event. Two weeks prior to WKCE Night, the ATP contacted custodians about the cafeteria setup. A few days before the event, final computer and projector arrangements were made.

According to Edison’s principal, “get[ting] the word out to many people” about an event like WKCE Night is extremely important. Parents received flyers in their children’s report cards, read postings on the school website, saw community flyers, and received Alert-Now messages. Event planners called the parents of Saturday school students, individually, to invite them to attend. If WKCE Night is conducted again, Edison leaders want to involve students and parents in event planning and increase attendance by advertising at the public library and in other venues.

WKCE Night helped parents and students focus together on “the” test so that the students would do their best.

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