

A PARENT'S GUIDE TO STANDARDIZED ACHIEVEMENT TESTING

Oregon law (OAR 581-021-0026) requires standardized achievement testing for home school students at the end of 3rd, 5th, 8th and 10th grades. These specific standardized tests provide an indication of how much knowledge a student has accumulated at a given point in his or her schooling in relation to other children of the same age in schools across the state and nation.

Standardized achievement test results can affirm your child's learning progress and your teaching ability. If testing indicates that a child is struggling in certain areas, you will be able to provide additional support and use different methods of instruction to help the child gain necessary skills.

WHAT ARE STANDARDIZED TESTS?

A standardized test is an objective test that is given and scored in a uniform manner.

- Standardized tests are developed by educational testing experts. They are carefully constructed and items are selected after trials for appropriateness and difficulty, to make sure the results are accurate and meaningful.
- All students who take the same version of a standardized test will have the same conditions and the same amount of time to complete the test.
- Standardized tests usually assess student skills and knowledge on a broad level and may test all academic areas at the same time (math, reading, science, etc.)

ARE THERE DIFFERENT KINDS OF STANDARDIZED TESTS?

There are many kinds of standardized tests that are used for a variety of purposes with both children and adults. The standardized tests required for home schooled students under Oregon law (OAR 581-021-0026) are "academic achievement" tests. These tests are designed to measure the things that a student knows and can do. Tests approved for assessment of home school students are the two most recent versions of the following nationally recognized tests:

- California Achievement Test
- Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills
- IOWA Tests of Basic Skills/Tests of Achievement and Proficiency
- Metropolitan Achievement Battery
- Stanford Achievement Test Battery

These tests are norm-referenced. Norm-referenced tests measure basic concepts and skills commonly taught in schools throughout the country. These tests are not designed to measure a specific curriculum, but rather the knowledge generally taught at a particular grade level. Results from a norm-referenced test compare a student's performance to a national reference group (the "norm") of students at the same grade. Individual results on these tests are usually reported as a percentage or percentile. A percentile rank indicates the percentage of the

norm obtaining scores equal to or less than the tests-taker's score. A percentile score does not refer to the percentage of questions answered correctly. Instead it indicates the test-taker's standing relative to the norm group standard.

WHAT ACHIEVEMENT TESTS CAN AND CANNOT DO:

Remember that a standardized achievement test cannot measure the sum total of your child's progress. It is only one assessment tool designed to measure a certain set of skills.

Achievement Tests Can:

- Measure your child's ability to recall certain facts, basic skills, and concepts common to the grade tested
- Compare your child's scores with other students' scores.
- Assess your child's year-to-year development of learning, if the same test is used for several years.
- Help you determine your child's academic strengths and weaknesses, as well as the effectiveness of your curriculum, teaching methods, or emphasis, when results are combined with your own observations.

Achievement Tests Can't:

- Tell you if your child has achieved academically to the level of his ability.
- Measure your child's many other skills and abilities not on the test.
- Replace your own informed evaluation of your child's knowledge and skills gained from your daily observation of his work and more thorough and frequent review questions.

INTERPRETING THE SCORE:

Raw Scores: A raw score is the number of items answered correctly on a given test. Raw scores by themselves have little or no meaning. A child's Raw Score (number correct) is compared to the original group of students of the same age who first took the test. The averages of this original group are called the "Norms". Norm-refered test scores compare a child's raw score to the norm group. Next, a child's raw scores are converted into scaled scores, grade equivalents, percentiles and stanines.

Scaled Score: A scaled score is a mathematical transformation of a raw score. Scaled scores are useful when comparing test results over time. Most standardized achievement test batteries provide scaled scores for such purposes. Several different methods of scaling exist, but each is intended to provide a continuous score scale across the different forms and levels of a test series.

Grade-Equivalent: This is the most commonly misunderstood term in interpreting test scores. The first digit represents the year of the grade level and the digit after the decimal represents the month of that grade level. If a 2nd grader gets a 5.4, it does not mean the child is ready for the 5th grade. It just means that an average 5th grader would have scored as well on the same test. It also lets you know the 2nd grader mastered the material very well and answered most of the questions correctly.

Percentile: This score ranks individuals within a group on a scale of 1-99 with 50 being average. There isn't a 100th percentile because a child can't do better than himself. A percentile rank of 75 means the student scored better than 75 percent of the other students in his or her norm group, and 25 percent scored as well or better than your student. It does not mean the student got 75% of the items correct. Percentile does not refer to the percent of questions that were answered correctly.

Stanine: This term comes from the combination of the words "standard of nine". It rates a child's achievement on a scale of 1-9 based on a coarse grouping of the scores. In general, a stanine of 1, 2 or 3 indicates below average achievement. A stanine of 4, 5 or 6 indicates average achievement, while 7, 8 or 9 indicate above average.

THINGS TO CONSIDER WHEN A CHILD OBTAINS LOW TESTS SCORES:

If a home school student does not meet the 15th percentile, the student will be required to test again in a year at the next grade level. If the results of the second test show a declining score, further steps may be necessary.

Students wishing to participate in interscholastic activities with the resident public school must achieve at or above the 23rd percentile on an annual test.

What do you do when a child scores low but above the 15th percentile? Or low in just one or two areas? A low test score can mean that the child simply didn't remember what he was taught or maybe hadn't been taught the material that was tested. Always compare the test results to your own observations. If the low score is consistent with your personal observation and evaluation of your child's skill, develop a plan to strengthen this skill. Your plan may include checking to see if the skill was taught, re-teaching the skill utilizing a different approach, checking curriculum content and methodology, and evaluating the effectiveness of your teaching methods.

Most importantly, when reacting to low scores, remember that scores have nothing to do with a child's innate worth. Your reaction, positive or negative, will influence the child's sense of self-worth and anxiety on future tests. Tell your child that you will try to find the reason for the low scores, and help to improve the weak areas. Be sure to include praise for the strong areas. Always take into account that no one measure gets at the complete picture, and that the best measure of how a child is performing will be the observation of the parent and teacher.