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Teaching, learning, and high-stakes testing

Standardized tests can be stressful for students, parents, and educators. The good news is parents and other caring adults can employ strategies to help make test-taking less stressful for students.

Testing tips to help students succeed

- **Provide opportunities to share concerns:** High-stakes tests cause many students anxiety not because they aren't prepared, but because they are afraid of disappointing their parents and teachers.
- **Discuss the exam and put it in perspective:** Explain to students that the tests will challenge them but to stay calm and do the best they can. Discuss why the exam is given and review test-taking strategies.
- **Teach and practice relaxation techniques:** Teaching children deep breathing and positive visualization techniques can help them relax when testing anxiety arises.
- **Write about it:** Ask students to write or keep a journal about their feelings as they prepare for testing.
- **Act it out:** Have students act out their stress by role-playing, creating comic strips, or writing songs.
- **Get a good night's sleep before test day:** Studies show that well-rested students perform better on exams. Exercise or go for a walk after dinner, avoid television, videogames, and other distractions, and get to bed on time.
- **Fuel up with good food and stay hydrated:** Hunger is distracting and slows our ability to think. Healthy breakfasts and snacks should be available before any high-stakes tests.
- **Stretch:** Brain research shows that it is important to keep blood flowing freely throughout your body if you want the brain to stay sharp.
- **Remind students to listen and pace themselves:** Prepare students to listen carefully to directions and to ask questions. Encourage them to be aware of time, pace themselves, and review the test before handing it in to be sure all the answers are completed.
- **Have fun:** Before and after tests, have a little fun with your children to break up the stress.



Gov. Wolf urges less emphasis on high-stakes testing

Testing is an important tool to track student progress, but overloading students with too many high-stakes tests can put a lot of stress on them and take precious time away from classroom learning.

Gov. Tom Wolf has said Pennsylvania's school accountability system should focus less on standardized test scores and more on ensuring that all students get the "thorough and efficient" education guaranteed to them by the state constitution.

"Education is a full and holistic process," Gov. Wolf told WHY's Newsworks. "We've reduced it to a bunch of high-stakes tests that don't seem to me to be tied to the specific, comprehensive skills that we want students to have."

Commentary: Opening the classroom doors to one and all

By Christopher Clayton, Assistant Director of Education Services at Pennsylvania State Education Association (PSEA)

“Each day, students board a bus or parents drop them off at the schoolhouse door where a teacher stands ready to welcome them. That teacher stands there with open arms, an open classroom, and a simple message: No matter what is going on or where you come from, send your children to me, and I will teach them.”

Americans will celebrate National Teacher Appreciation Day on May 5. It is a good opportunity to take a moment to reflect on what teachers do every single day and ponder the unspoken yet implicit promise on which they consistently deliver.

Each day, students board a bus or parents drop them off at the schoolhouse door where a teacher stands ready to welcome them. That teacher stands there with open arms, an open classroom, and a simple message: No matter what is going on or where you come from, send your children to me, and I will teach them. I will help mold them into the best, most excellent version of themselves that they can become. And I will not ask for a bank statement or credit score or calculate an asset-to-liability ratio. Send them to me, and I will teach them, no matter what.

Some critics of public education would like to apply a business model to the education of our children. Businesses, unlike public schools, have direct and strict control of the raw, incoming materials they use to create products for sale. If there is an imperfection with the raw material, the business can reject it and demand new materials from their suppliers to ensure that their final widget is exactly and efficiently produced. This model does not work when applied to our children.

For, as public educators, we certainly do not have any control over the children who arrive at our public schools, nor do we have any desire to produce widgets. We want to help and teach not yet fully formed human beings. Kids. And there is not an efficient business model for that. Anyone who is or has been a parent knows that is a "capital T" Truth.

It is also important to remember that the model for public education we do have is working. Students are achieving at levels never seen before in U.S. history. Consider these facts:

Graduation rates in American high schools are at an all-time high — 81 percent in 2012-13. Pennsylvania's graduation rate is greater than 85.5 percent, placing it ninth among all states. According to the U.S. Department of Education: "Between 2010-11 and 2012-13, the graduation rates for American Indian, black, and Hispanic students increased by nearly four percentage points over two years, outpacing the growth for all students."

The population of U.S. students attending college has nearly doubled in less than 40 years, according to the National Center for Education Statistics. Unprecedented numbers of students are taking college-level courses in high school, and many are graduating with college course credits.

These facts add up to one conclusion: Today's U.S. students are graduating at the highest rates ever seen, going to college at the highest rates ever seen, and doing so after attaining and accomplishing more than any group of American students ever seen before.

Read more about the successes of students in Pennsylvania's public schools at www.psea.org/solutionsthatwork/.

Christopher Clayton earned a Ph.D. in Language & Literacy Education and is a National Board Certified Teacher.

Partner Benefits: Spring has sprung so have some fun!

Give your kids a break from stressful end-of-year testing by taking them to have some outdoor fun. Partners and their families can find discounts and savings on a variety of outdoor activities through Partner Benefits discounts. Visit the **Partner Benefits** page to sign in to Access and select "Entertainment & Recreation" under Categories. .



About Partners for Public Education

Partners for Public Education is working to provide you with resources about public education in Pennsylvania because we are committed to the success of every child. It is brought to you by the *Pennsylvania State Education Association*, an organization made up of the dedicated employees in your Pennsylvania public schools.

April 2015



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