

FACT SHEET FOR FAMILIES ON TESTING AND YOUNG CHILDREN

Children in today's preschools, kindergartens, and early elementary grades must take many tests on rote skills and facts. This has led to more drill-based instruction of narrow skills. The emphasis on testing has had negative impact on children's healthy development and learning. Young children need rich learning experiences in the early school years that encourage active, play-based learning. They need to develop social skills, creativity, problem solving, and a love for learning. The most reliable ways to evaluate young children's learning are through ongoing observations by skilled teachers and assessments of children's work and play over time.

WHY TESTING IS HARMFUL TO YOUNG CHILDREN

- Testing changes what and how children are taught.
 - ◇ Preparing for and taking tests means less time for valuable activities that young children need for learning, such as building with blocks and other materials, art projects, and imaginative play.
 - ◇ Deprived of these engaging activities, children may lose interest in school and learning.
- Testing can cause stress and make children feel that school is not a safe place.



- ◇ Parents, teachers, and mental health professionals report many more symptoms of test stress among young children, including nausea, crying, panic attacks, tantrums, headaches, sleeplessness, depression, and refusal to go to school.
- ◇ Test stress is especially harmful to more vulnerable children, such as those with special needs or children whose first language is not English.

- Testing may make children feel “dumb,” especially when tested on materials that are developmentally inappropriate.
- Today's tests are often taken on computers, though child development experts warn against young children spending too much time on computers.
 - ◇ Schools may spend money on technology instead of hands-on learning materials.
 - ◇ Computer-based testing, when used with young children, may not be accurate.



WHY TESTING IS NOT NEEDED

- Evaluating young children is different than evaluating older children and adults.
 - ◊ Because young children learn differently than older children and adults, they should be assessed in ways that match how they learn, not with traditional written tests.
 - ◊ Tests given to children younger than eight often produce false or confusing results.
- Young children’s development changes quickly.
 - ◊ They grow in four areas — physical, cognitive, social, and emotional development — all at different rates.
 - ◊ Their growth and development depends on many factors, such as their health, nutrition, and what’s happening in their family, such as a new baby or a divorce.
- Testing does not provide teachers with helpful information about individual children’s cultural experiences, individual interests, strengths, and needs.
- Teachers feel that testing mandates force them to engage in practices that harm children.

GOOD ASSESSMENT PRACTICES WHEN WORKING WITH YOUNG CHILDREN

- To understand young children, teachers must carefully observe them over time. This helps teachers create appropriate learning experiences and support for each child. It’s also important to use bias-free assessments that consider culture, language, family, and unique development.
- Besides observation, other good assessment practices include:
 - ◊ checklists
 - ◊ teachers’ written reports of children’s behaviors and skills (sometimes called anecdotal records and running records)
 - ◊ portfolios (teachers collect work samples throughout the year)
 - ◊ home inventories (parents report children’s behavior and skills)
 - ◊ developmental screenings (checking for signs that a child may be delayed in one or more areas).
- Teachers can use these assessments to understand and support each child’s learning and development and to identify who may need additional support or services.



For a more detailed version of this fact sheet and references, see [Fact Sheet on Testing and Young Children](http://www.deyproject.org) on the DEY website (www.deyproject.org).

WHAT FAMILIES CAN DO:

1. **Find out what tests your child will be required to take at school.** All parents/guardians have the right to refuse a test for their children.
2. **Ask to visit your child’s classroom and inquire about the daily schedule.** Look for play-based learning, creative arts, and physical activity — including recess.
3. **Inquire into your school’s data-collecting policy.** What is being gathered? How is it used?
4. **Ask whether your child’s data is displayed within the school.** Data walls and public ranking of children’s test scores undermines their security and fosters competition and fear.



5. **If you are not satisfied with the answers you are given, you can take several steps:** Try to find other families who feel similarly and begin to organize among yourselves. If you have a local school board, take your questions and demands to its members. Get help from state and national organizations that are working against over-testing and harmful education policies, such as Defending the Early Years ([deyproject.org](http://www.deyproject.org)), FairTest ([fairtest.org](http://www.fairtest.org)), and United Opt Out (www.unitedoptout.com).