

3.) Tips for Teachers on Ways to Help Students Do Their Best on Standardized Tests

The value of test results depends to a large extent on the atmosphere that surrounds the testing activities. The thoughtfulness and care with which testing is planned and conducted as well as the attitude and motivation of the students affect this atmosphere. When students are interested, feel confident about the test, and understand the procedures, the results are likely to be a more accurate measure of their skills and knowledge. The following are some suggestions to help create that atmosphere.

- ◆ Explain the purpose of the test to the students. Let them know that the test will be helpful in identifying the skills and knowledge that they have already mastered and those that they need to learn. Explain how standardized tests differ from classroom tests so that students understand the importance of each.
- ◆ Convey a positive attitude about the test and encourage the students to do their best. Let them know that some assessment activities may cover material they have not yet studied, and they are not expected to know all of the answers. However, encourage them to try all of the items, to pay careful attention to the directions, to use their time efficiently, and to review their answers if there is time.
- ◆ Help the students understand the value of testing as part of the educational process. The most effective motivation is self-motivation to do one's best.
- ◆ Review the testing schedule and the directions for administration in advance to ensure that class work can be organized to accommodate the testing sessions and that testing will go smoothly. Allow adequate time for each test section to be completed without interruptions. A relaxed atmosphere during testing will enable the students to do their best work.
- ◆ During regular class work, it may be helpful to write some classroom tests that are similar in format to the standardized test that will be taken. TerraNova has selected-response and constructed response questions. Providing opportunities throughout the year for students to become familiar with the different formats will make taking standardized tests that much easier.

- ◆ You may want to administer the practice tests several days before the actual tests. That way, if students are having difficulty with a particular format, there is a little more time for students to “experiment”. You may amplify the directions and explanations for the Practice Activities if it appears the students do not understand what they are to do. The Practice Activities are designed to familiarize students with the formats and the terminology used in TerraNova, and when applicable, to provide practice in using separate answer sheets. In addition, for the parts of the test using manipulatives, you may want to have the students punch out the pieces early and provide time for free exploration. It would be better for them to “explore” with the pieces when they have time, rather than when time is limited.
- ◆ There are many opinions about guessing on tests. Typically, you should encourage only *informed* guessing. The purpose of the test is to help students get the instruction they need. Blindly guessing at items will provide misleading information.
- ◆ Review the Teacher’s Guide to TerraNova. If you do not have a copy, check with your counselor. Every school has several copies. Inside you will find sample questions, information about the content of the test, descriptions/definitions for the objectives, and suggestions for teachers, parents, and students.