

Chalkboard

By

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High stakes testing begins this week at Gentry Public Schools and across the state of Arkansas. I use the term “high stakes” because, good or bad, a school district’s performance is measured by the Arkansas Department of Education with regard to the results of these exams. Sanctions are given to schools that do not “measure up”.

The general dates for the exams are as follow: April 7-18, 2008 – Window for K-2, Grade 9 NRT Testing, April 14-18, 2008 – Augmented Benchmark Exams in Grades 3-8 (Monday-Friday), April 22-23, 2008 – End of Course Geometry Exam (Tuesday-Wednesday), April 24-25, 2008 – End of Course Algebra I Exam (Thursday-Friday), April 29-30, 2008 – Mid-Year End of Course Biology Exam (Tuesday-Wednesday). Call it, if you will, the rest of April for some Gentry student or another.

What are some things you can do to help your child do his or her best? Here are some general thoughts from the national PTA site at http://www.pta.org/archive_article_details_1117835382718.html. “Instill the value of learning in your child at an early age. Make sure your children are good readers. Communicate frequently with your child's teacher or teachers. Know your child's learning progress and needs by monitoring assignments, homework, and test performance. Establish a regular time for homework and studying. Don't make your child nervous about tests, even big ones. Encourage your child to develop a positive attitude toward school and testing. Review tests with your child after they are returned home for what your child did and didn't understand. Remember, tests and grading systems are not perfect.”

Another site, http://parentingteens.about.com/cs/education/a/test_taking.htm, offers similar suggestions. “Don't be too anxious about a child's test scores. If you put too much emphasis on test scores, this can upset a child. Do encourage children. Praise them for the things they do well. If they feel good about themselves, they will do their best. Children who are afraid of failing are more likely to become anxious when taking tests and more likely to make mistakes. Don't judge a child on the basis of a single test score. Test scores are not perfect measures of what a child can do. There are many other things that might influence a test score. For example, a child can be affected by the way he or she is feeling, the setting in the classroom, and the attitude of the teacher. Remember, also, that one test is simply one test.

Meet with your child's teacher as often as possible to discuss his/her progress.

Ask the teacher to suggest activities for you and your child to do at home to help prepare for tests and improve your child's understanding of schoolwork. Parents and teachers should work together to benefit students. Make sure your child attends school regularly. Remember, tests do reflect children's overall achievement. The more effort and energy a child puts into learning, the more likely he/she will do well on tests. Provide a quiet, comfortable place for studying at home. Make sure that your child is well rested on school days and especially the day of a test. Children who are tired are less able to pay attention in class or to handle the demands of a test. Give your child a well-rounded diet. A healthy body leads to a healthy, active mind. Most schools provide free breakfast and lunch for economically disadvantaged students. If you believe your child qualifies, talk to the school principal. Provide books and magazines for your youngster to read at home. By reading new materials, a child will learn new words that might appear on a test. Ask your child's school about a suggested outside reading list or get suggestions from the public library.”

While both sites provide great ideas, both offer several thoughts that are best implemented from Day 1 of the school year and apply to class exams as well as state and national exams. Here are some tips that you can make sure to do for the time at hand whether your child is a kindergartner or high school junior.

Make sure your child gets a good night's sleep before test days; limit late night activities. Make sure your child eats breakfast before coming to school or eats after he or she arrives. Without becoming excessive, explain to your child the importance of doing his or her best; let them know you will be pleased if they have done their best regardless of the scores. Give them a hug and tell them that you are proud that he or she is your child.

That last one might be good from Day 1 and every day. After all, life itself is a high stakes test.