Basics of Assessment for Parents

ℹ️ Why Do Schools Test?

Schools test for several reasons, and with several different kinds of tests.

Teachers develop and give tests to see if what they have been teaching has been learned, and if it is time to move on to something new. Teacher tests show which students are not keeping up, and whether students have done their homework. Grades are often based in part on the results of teacher tests.

Some textbooks used in school contain tests to see if students are ready to go on to new material, and to see what students already know about the subject. Textbook tests show if what was in the chapter was really learned, and help students practice finding the main topics or skills presented in the chapter. Other tests are given throughout our lives. We are tested for driving skills, clerical skills, college entrance readiness, etc. Publishers produce different kinds of tests, too…

Data Recognition Corporation's (DRC) standardized achievement tests (also called norm-referenced tests) are given to measure students' progress compared to a national standard. That is, each student and each group of students is compared with thousands of other students who took the same test under the same conditions. Another type of publisher's tests is the criterion-referenced test (sometimes called curriculum-referenced tests). These tests are given to see how well a particular student is doing in a specific skill, and do not compare that student with others.

Data Recognition Corporation tests are designed to ensure the best educational experiences for every student. They are not traps and they have no trick questions. Think of them as weighing your child. The child steps on the scales and a number—the weight—is shown. You can then compare that number with charts that show ranges of weights for all children all over the country. DRC's tests "weigh" your child's school progress.

DRC's tests give a "snapshot" picture of each student's progress, giving the teacher and the parents a checkpoint of what skills and knowledge the student now has. *TerraNova 3* tests show where the child needs more help—what has not yet been learned—as well as what has not yet been taught. The tests also show if what has been taught has been learned well enough to become a skill the child can demonstrate. *TerraNova 3* tests help the teacher keep track of each student's progress and needs for the immediate future.

ℹ️ How Are the Results Used?

TerraNova 3 test results are NOT used by the school for grades, nor to punish and reward students. These test results ARE used to help teachers improve instruction in the classroom. They are used to show teachers which students need extra help, and in which particular areas.

TerraNova's test results may also be used to help schools decide which students are eligible for special classes. Some government funds are provided to schools based on test results, particularly funds to help children with greater than usual learning needs. In some schools, funds for enrichment classes for mentally gifted children may also be given based on test results.

TerraNova 3 test results are used to show the student's progress or his/her whole school life, not just one or two years. If a child moves to another school, even in another state, the record of that student's test results usually goes along. The new school can then see immediately which class best suits that child. (This is just one of the benefits of taking a nationally-standardized test. All students are compared against the same standard.)

It is important to remember that standardized tests are only one measure of your child's progress. Teacher observation and class participation, for example, are equally important ways of keeping track of students' school progress.

Christian School Program (CSP) Bible Subtest:

The CSP Bible Assessment was developed by over 100 Christian school educators from all grade levels. The set of Bible Assessment items included at each grade level are developed from two key perspectives:

1. Content Clusters: Each item addresses a core element of a strong Bible curriculum, such as knowledge of creation, Christ, Old and New Testament Bible stories, Bible organization and structure, the Church, and Christian living. Content Clusters can vary by grade level.

2. Process Clusters: Each item is also considered based on whether it is assessing Knowledge (recall, recognition), Comprehension (demonstration of understanding), or Application (purposeful use or relevance) of biblical information. Process Clusters are the same across all grade levels.

Each item on the Bible Assessment addresses both a Content Cluster and a Process Cluster. This dual nature is reflected in the Bible Assessment reports and allows CSP educators to assess the biblical content students have acquired at each grade level, as well as their understanding and application of Scripture.

This subtest can help Christian educators identify strengths of their Bible instructional program and serve as tools to assist with evaluating the Bible curriculum, promoting dialogue among the staff and the school community, and focusing further support and instruction for individual students.

What Do the Scores Mean?

The *TerraNova 3* scores reported on the Parent Report are percentile ranks, not percent of items correct on the test. The score reported on each test (NP or national percentile) compares your student's performance to that of students in the same grade in the nation. In other words, it ranks your child's score against a large number of students in the country who took the same test. For example, a percentile of 78 means the student did as well or better than 78 % of students in the country. The 50th Percentile represents the average performance.

The Christian School Program Bible Assessment results report the number and percent of students at four Performance Levels: Advanced, Proficient, Basic, and Below Basic. Your child's/children's performance on the Bible Student Profile is described by a "Scale Score." This Scale Score is the conversion of your child's/children's raw score (number of items he/she answered correctly) on the Bible Assessment subtest to a common scale that allows for numerical comparison between students. The Scale Score is particularly useful for comparing student test scores over time, such as measuring semester-to-semester and year-to-year growth of individual students or groups of students in a content area. The Scale Scores on the Bible Assessment subtest can range in value from approximately 100 to 900.

The Scale Score will correlate to a Performance Level for the Bible Assessment subtest to assist your understanding of your child's/children's strengths and needs in Bible study. There are four Performance Levels that describe your child's/children's performance on the Bible Student Profile. Those levels are:

1. Advanced—Exceptional mastery of biblical facts and principles with a strong understanding of how to apply them.

2. Proficient—Solid mastery of biblical facts and principles with a firm understanding of how to apply them.
3. Basic—Partial mastery of biblical facts and principles with some understanding of how to apply them.
4. Below Basic—Little or no mastery of biblical facts and principles with little understanding of how to apply them.

ℹ How Does Your School Use the Results from *TerraNova 3* and the Bible Assessment?

It is important to recognize that standardized testing, while valuable, constitutes only a small part of the school's evaluation program. It should be recognized that standardized testing serves some purposes better than others, that there are limitations and strengths in each of the various techniques used to measure student progress, and that assessment is a means to an end and not an end in itself. The following is a list of several uses of the data from the *TerraNova 3* tests and the Bible Assessment used by most schools:

1. Obtain a measure of student growth.
2. Assist in curriculum planning and improvement of instruction.
3. Use to gauge the students' progress towards mastery of nationally-recognized content standards.

ℹ How Does a Parent Use These Scores?

The score from a single battery of tests is not necessarily going to be an accurate indication of overall understanding of a content area. With this in mind, it is recommended that all reporting of student achievement be used to form an observation of strengths and areas of need for each student. The data from *TerraNova 3* is considered an external assessment, and along with all of the internal (i.e., classroom) assessments, this information can be used to guide instruction. The scores from *TerraNova 3* do not affect report card grades.

If scores from the *TerraNova 3* tests are received for several years in a row, you would be able to see if the student is growing at an average rate, below average rate, or above average rate if you were to notice the NP (National Percentile) scores from year to year. For example, if a student had an NP of 50 in grade 3 reading and the same NP of 50 in grade 5 reading, then you would conclude that the student is progressing at an average rate in reading achievement. If a student were to achieve an NP of 65 in one

year for reading, and then two years later be tested with a higher level of the reading test and receive an NP of 65, then you could assume the student is maintaining an above-average progress rate.

How to Help Your Child — Before the Test

Before the test…the best way to help your child is to be encouraging and supportive all year round, not just at testing time. Make sure your child attends school regularly, eats well-balanced meals, gets enough sleep, and completes all homework assignments.

Provide books and magazines for your child to read at home, and be interested in what your child has to say about them. Be generous with praise for the things your child does well. A child who feels good about himself or herself will always do better than a child who is afraid of failing. Encourage the sort of good work habits that are useful in test taking, as well as in other work. These habits include following directions carefully, avoiding careless errors, and looking over their work.

Let your child know that you consider the test important, but try not to be too anxious. Be matter-of-fact about it; testing is a way of life. Don't lead your child to expect a reward for doing well, nor punishment for doing not so well.

Let your child know that the test is not a trap, but a "snapshot" of what the child has learned so far. Studying at the last minute for the test won't help very much because the tests will cover more schoolwork than can be learned in a few extra hours.

Find out from the school as much as you can about the tests. Find out what day or days the tests will be given, and about how long the testing will take. The more you know, the better you can prepare your child. We all do better when we know what to expect.

Let your child know you expect him/her to do the best he/she can. Encourage your child to try to answer each question without lingering too long on any one question. Let your child know that students might not finish every part of the test.

How to Help Your Child — The Day of the Test

Start the day calmly. Reassure your child again that it is okay (normal!) to feel a little nervous. In fact, he/she will probably do a better job and be more alert. Be sure your child has a good, nourishing breakfast each test day.

Test-taking is hard work and takes lots of energy. Pack a nutritious snack and/or lunch for later. Be sure your child is at school on time. Rushing and worrying about being late could affect performance on the test.

Remind your child to follow directions carefully and that you know he/she will do the best possible, but don't overload the child with too much advice and words of wisdom. And don't forget to ask at the end of the day how it went from your child's point of view.

ℹ️ How to Help Your Child — After the Test

Ask the teacher if the test results are consistent with your child's classroom performance. Let the teacher know if you feel the results don't match what you feel to be your child's abilities. Pass along any information about unusual circumstances during the test-taking, illness for example.

Ask your child's teacher to suggest activities that will help improve any weak areas revealed by the testing. Share the results with your child in a matter-of-fact way. Point out your child's strengths, as well as areas in which he/she is not as strong. Be careful not to give the impression that you are judging your child on the test results.

Tests are only one way to measure your child's progress in school. Remember, there is no such thing as a bad test result. Every test taken reveals important information about your child's progress in school. Continue to show interest in your child's school and schoolwork. Continue to encourage your child's interest in learning new things.