

# Parent pages



Resources for Christian parents in the 21st Century

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## The Maze of Test Scores

**W**ith the administration of No Child Left Behind, tests and scores have once again taken the main spotlight on the education stage. But do they deserve a starring role in determining how well our children are doing in school?

Parents want and need to know about their children's progress. Yet, danger lies in focusing on test scores and ignoring the other evaluation techniques available. Problems also can arise when test scores are misused or misunderstood.

So here we stand at the opening of the maze. The prize at the other end is a healthy understanding of your child's strengths and weaknesses. Here are some vocabulary tools to help you navigate the maze:

### Product Evaluation

Achievement test scores, spelling tests, homework, and report cards are all examples of product evaluation. Your child took a test or completed an activity and it's graded in comparison to other students. It is an important part of evaluation to know how well your child is doing in comparison to other children.

However, product evaluation can be compromised if your child is not feeling well, is bothered by something, or does

not test well. Also, this type of evaluation cannot tell you if your child has learned anything new. For example, a good speller's perfect test score does not guarantee that new words were learned, only that words already known were on the test.

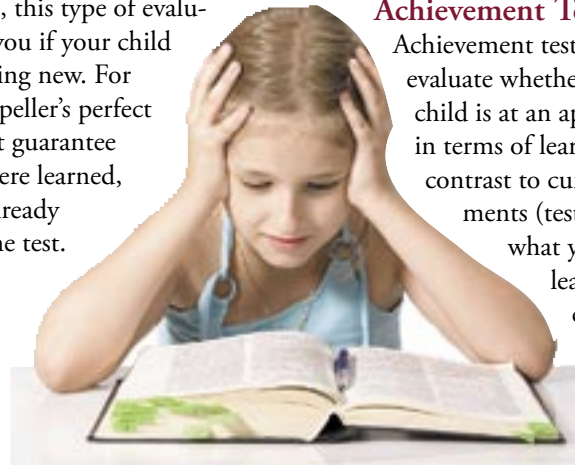
### Process Evaluation

Whenever a student's work is compared from one point of the year to the next, process evaluation has occurred. Process evaluation will not tell you how well your child is doing compared to other students in the class or across the nation, but it will tell you if your child is improving in a skill or is learning new skills.

Process evaluation relies on several examples of your child's work, in a variety of contexts and testing forms so it's not usually compromised by a bad day or a weak test. Both product and process evaluation need to be considered to get a complete picture of student progress.

### Achievement Tests

Achievement tests attempt to evaluate whether or not your child is at an appropriate level in terms of learning skills. In contrast to curriculum assessments (test that evaluate what your child has learned from the curriculum that the school uses), achievement tests evaluate what a



child should be expected to know. The final score is derived by comparing your child's score to those of thousands of other children to determine what is normal and where your child fits on that scale.

This is why the scores come in percentiles and grade equivalencies instead of percents or raw scores (how many questions were answered correctly). Achievement tests are stronger evaluations of the school and curriculum than individual progress. They are only a part of an individual child's evaluation.

### Reliability

Checking reliability is one way to evaluate tests. This is an indication of how reliable a test score is over time. By giving an achievement test to thousands of students, reliability is established. This suggests that if the same test was given

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two days in a row to the same students, the same scores would result. Reliability is determined through statistics.

### Validity

Checking for validity is the second way to evaluate tests. If a test is valid, then it actually tests what you intend it to test.

For example, if you give a child with poor reading skills a math test with story problems, is the test evaluating math or reading skills? Product evaluations, while often being reliable, can have serious issues with validity.

I had a student who was gifted in math but qualified for remedial help in math because he had difficulty with comprehension. This result indicated a lack of validity in that standardized test.

### Percentiles

A raw score on an achievement test is used to determine a percentile rank. Percentiles are a method of ranking scores. They are an indication of what percent of the tested population ranked higher or lower than your child.

A percentile of 90 indicates that your child tested better than 89 percent of all of the students taking the test for that year. It does not mean that your child missed only 10 percent of the answers. It is possible for your child to have a low raw score, but compared to other students with lower scores, he could still have a high percentile rank.

This is why these tests are best used for comparison purposes and not to determine what actual skills your child retains.

### Grade Equivalency

Grade equivalency indicates the approximate grade level that matches your child's skill level. It is a general score and is not intended to indicate that retention or skipping a grade is recommended. These scores do not relate from test to test either. I have seen a student who, over two years and two different tests, changed eight years in grade equivalency.

When navigating the maze of test scores, it is important to watch out for

roadblocks. Reading and math tests evaluate skills out of context of normal use. It is akin to demonstrating that you can use the brakes on a bike while standing still.

Tests can use vocabulary that is different than the curriculum or can be testing skills not taught yet for the year. If your child's test scores are low but classroom performance is good, trust the classroom performance. While helpful when used correctly, achievement tests are not always right.

Report cards and classroom tests, projects, and homework will give you a better picture of how well your child uses the skills that are taught and tested. These scores are product evaluation, but when you look at progress over the semester or the year, you get a better picture of what your child has learned.

When we crammed for tests in high school, we might have passed the test but we didn't really learn anything until we used the skills. We remember the skills we use most often.

Portfolio assessments are used by some schools to formalize process evaluation. A portfolio includes samples of student work and tests that show skills that have been learned and practiced. Sometimes portfolios are sent home at the end of a year and sometimes they are passed from teacher to teacher. Parent/teacher conferences can be a less formal means of this type of assessment. Teachers often share samples of writing from the beginning of the term and the end to show improvement of skills.

Achievement tests can be a helpful evaluation tool but should always be considered in the light of classroom work and teacher observation. If you have concerns about your child's test scores or classroom work, do not wait and worry. Make an appointment with your child's teacher and let him or her help you to see the big

picture. Then you will have a map to get out of the maze with the information you need.

**"The LORD does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but he LORD looks at the heart."**

**1 Sam.**

**16:7**

Some children are blessed with academic abilities and others are not. Each child has been blessed with gifts and a

loving heavenly Father who provides opportunities for the child to use those gifts.

When going over test scores and grades, take the opportunity to study your child's strengths and weaknesses outside the classroom. Celebrate these gifts from God too. I have seen many academically gifted children over my years of teaching. The successful children are most often the ones who know they are loved unconditionally, regardless of their academic ability.

God helped their parents to look at the heart.



### For Discussion:

- What evaluation tools tell you how much progress your child has made this year?
- What evaluation tools tell you how your child performs compared to other students?
- Why is it important to know how your child performs?
- Why is it important to know how much progress your child has made?