

The new state tests in grades 6-8

What families need to know

This school year, children in grades 6, 7 and 8 will take new state tests in English language arts and math. Similar exams have been in place for eighth graders for a number of years, as have tests in second languages, science, social studies and technology.

Although testing at all levels can provide useful feedback about how well children are learning their lessons, testing during the middle school years is considered particularly important.

The pre-teen years are a time of rapid change for kids. Physically, socially and emotionally, the years between 10 and 13 rival the first three years of children's lives in terms of growth. Often, all this upheaval can leave kids less self-assured and less interested in academics.

However, demanding state and national learning standards don't allow students the luxury of taking a break from academics during the middle school years. Everything about school today—from the courses students take to the tests they need to pass in order to graduate—is more demanding than ever before. Success with their middle school lessons now will help students excel later on.

Testing children regularly throughout the middle school years is one way of ensuring that they are progressing academically. Such tests help show whether children need additional help to confidently move ahead in school. These tests will also help teachers identify where the curriculum might need to be fine-tuned to better meet students' needs.

A look at the new middle school tests

The new state tests are carefully designed to reflect the types of information and skills that children are expected to learn at their respective grade levels. Although students will be given opportunities throughout the year to become familiar with the format of these tests, the school year will not be spent drilling for these exams. Instead, the primary focus of middle school education is on expanding children's knowledge in many subject areas, teaching them to be more self-reliant and preparing them for the academic challenges that lay ahead.

The English language arts (ELA) tests

The English language arts tests are administered in two sessions for students in grade 7 and three sessions in grades 6 and 8. These exams are designed to measure students' abilities in reading, listening and writing. The tests contain a variety of questions including multiple choice, short- and extended-response and editing tasks.

Math

The middle school mathematics tests are administered in two sessions in grades 6 and 7 and three sessions in grade 8. They are designed to assess how well students have mastered the newly proposed mathematics learning standard.

At all grade levels, students will apply the skills and knowledge gained in the classroom in order to answer three types of questions: multiple-choice, short-response, and extended-response.

Sample questions:

Sample listening question (grade 6)

After listening to a story about Sojourner Truth, a woman whose heroic life inspired many both before and after the Civil War, students will answer questions such as the following:

1. Why do you think Sojourner Truth changed her name from the one she was given when she was born? Was her choice of name a good one? Write an essay in which you explain why Sojourner Truth changed her name, what that name represented to her, and whether the name was a good choice. Use details from the article to support your answer. In your answer, be sure to include:

- why Sojourner Truth changed her name
- what her new name represented to her
- whether her new name was a good choice
- details from the article to support your answer

Check your writing for correct spelling, grammar and punctuation.

Sample editing question (grade 7)

There are some mistakes in this paragraph. Some sentences may have more than one mistake, and other sentences may contain no mistakes at all. There are no mistakes in spelling. Read the paragraph and find the mistakes. Draw a line through each mistake in the paragraph. Then write the correction above it.

When you look up at the night sky, you see the beautiful stars shining, you see a full moon. The view from space can be quite another matter, though. From Earth you cannot see none of the nuts, bolts, paint chips, and other assorted pieces of space debris orbits Earth every day. The worst thing about space debris is not it's ugly appearance; space debris can be extremely dangerously. These bits of metal and other junk travels through the air at speeds greater than 20,000 miles an hour and can create serious damage.

Sample math short response question (grade6)

Elissa and Matt bought $\frac{7}{8}$ of a yard of fabric to make a class project. They used only $\frac{1}{3}$ of a yard. How much fabric was left? Show your work.

Answer: yard

Sample math Multiple choice question (grade 8)

The regular price of a CD is \$18.00. If the CD is on sale for 15% off the regular price, what is the sale price?

- A \$2.70
- B \$15.30
- C \$16.20
- D \$16.50



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