

## **From the Tutor: When is It Time to be Concerned About Standardized Test Scores?**

The end-of-school-year standardized test scores nationwide are delivered to parents in late summer. Should you be concerned? How can you tell? This article will discuss standardized testing and scores. It will end with a list of clues that it MIGHT be time for you to be concerned about your child's results.

What you care about is how to use scores to help you understand your own child's academic progress and know when it is time to take action. Before you go any farther you need to know about the test. The score report should tell you what was tested and when. It should also break down overall scores into different Topics. For instance, Language Arts should break down into categories such as Word Recognition, Reading and Grammar Conventions. Talk to a teacher or look at the test's website if you don't understand the topic names.

There are two different designs for standardized tests. Understanding the differences can go far in helping you understand the scores:

- Tests that compare a student's answers to expected 'standards' [criterion-referenced] are somewhat like a classroom test in that they work on a percentage-wise result. For instance a student with 75% correct might get results that read "Proficient." The relative meanings of the results categories should be clear on the score report. This type of test will yield a fairly direct indication of the student's mastery of specific class material.
- Tests that compare one student's results to the average results of other student's at that grade level [norm-referenced] give their results in 'percentile's or 'stanine's in most cases. This type of test will give you an understanding of how your student is doing within his or her peer group. The numeric result indicates how many of the other test-takers your child outscored - Percentile on a 0-99 scale and Stanine on a 0-9 scale.

If you see any of the clues in the next list you need to take action. If you decide that extra support is needed then turn to a professional – a teacher or tutor who will spend TIME. That is, time to first get to know your child, then to assess specific areas of strength and weakness and only THEN begin instruction and guided practice.



Here are specific things to look for:

1. Test scores 'suddenly' dropping as compared to the same or similar test last semester/year. This could mean something insignificant like your child having a cold on test day or even getting off-line on the answer sheet. On the other hand it could be telling you about something that will continue if not alleviated such as an eyesight problem. Or it could, and often does, indicate that some basic skills are not yet developed as they should be and tutoring is needed going forward.
2. Test scores are much lower than grades
  - a. Norm-referenced test – it might indicate test anxiety or it might mean that your child is very good at graded opportunities like homework, class participation, projects or even classroom behavior as those things are a part of grades but not test scores. Practice and instruction in test-taking skills can alleviate the difference.
  - b. Criterion-referenced - the above things might apply here but it might also indicate that the overall performance in reference to standards is not where it should be. In this case specifically search out the school's overall results for comparison and get involved if your school needs improvement.
3. Test scores are much higher than grades – this probably paints a picture of a bright student learning well but not as compliant with things like homework as he or she might be. Study skills instruction and support might be called for.
4. Your son or daughter is clearly not interested in scores OR grades [and also perhaps does not do regular homework]. This could indicate any of a number of problems – but if it is paired with low grades and/or scores consider that your child might be falling far enough behind academically that he or she is just giving up. Check with his or her teacher for an opinion and advice. Step in with encouragement and tutoring aimed at accelerating learning up to grade level.

No matter what the scores and grades YOUR concern and involvement is one of the most important factors in your child's school success. Thanks for reading!

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