

Beginning in just a few more weeks, many of our students will be taking the Ohio Achievement Tests. These exams are given each year to students in grades three through eight.

All students in those grades take the reading and math tests. Students in grades four and seven also take the writing test. And students in grades five and eight add the science and social studies test.

Those exams will begin in April. Some of our high school students are taking exams this week, as they tackle the Ohio Graduation Test.

Testing is important to both the individual students and to our district as whole. For students, these test results offer their teachers a way to see if the child is making year-to-year progress, and to assess strengths and weaknesses. Where a student is strong, we can provide more challenges. Where they're not strong, we can provide more support. Of course, we also do other assessments throughout the school year, for the same reasons.

The tests are important to the district because they give us a chance to assess our own curriculum and instruction. We can do things like refining the professional development we provide to our teachers, or modifying the instructional schedules our teachers use.

Another reason the tests are important is because our students' test scores account for 28 of the 30 standards that determine our state ranking. Right now we are ranked "excellent" by the Ohio Dept. of Education.

The format of the test questions has changed over the years. Some are the traditional multiple choice, and the questions count for one point each. Then there are "short answer" questions, which always have two elements in the answers and are worth two points. There are also "extended response" questions, which have four elements in the answer and are worth four points. On the writing test, there are both multiple choice questions and prompts that students respond to with their own writing.

One great resource for parents who want to learn more about these tests, and help ensure their children are prepared for them, is the Ohio Dept. of Education website (www.ode.state.oh.us). In its "testing" section there is a wealth of information, including archives of past exams that can be used as practice tests.

I thought it would be interesting to show readers a couple of sample questions. Here's one from the eighth-grade science exam:

By what process is energy transferred when sound waves travel through air?

- A. absorption of sound waves by surfaces
- B. vibrations of perpendicular electric and magnetic fields
- C. flow of air currents away from the sound source to the listener
- D. consecutive, repeating collisions or interactions of air particles

And one more, from the fifth-grade social studies exam:

What was one result of the Battle of Fallen Timbers?

- A. The American government bought the Louisiana Territory.
- B. Many American Indians left the eastern and southern parts of Ohio.
- C. The Spanish government closed the Mississippi River to American traders.
- D. British outposts promised to defend the American Indians in the Northwest Territory.

To check your answers, just ask a fifth-grader or an eighth-grader from the Fairfield Schools.

You can see why our kids' backpacks are so heavy every day, and why we're so proud of them for how well they do.

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