



A newsletter from the New Mexico Parent Information Resource Center (NMPIRC)



News and ideas to promote parental involvement in the public schools

Everything You Ever Wanted to Know About Testing (or not!)

There is never a lack of opinions when it comes to the subject of testing. There are those who support testing, and then there are those who object to the amount of testing schools must conduct. As parents, no matter what our opinions are, it is our responsibility to be informed and do our best to support our kids. Testing is intended to help parents and educators know if children are making academic progress, and if not, in what areas they may need a little more assistance.



Types of Testing

Throughout the year, all schools conduct Short Cycle Assessments. Short Cycle Assessments are tests that are conducted two to three times a year. The assessments are first given at the beginning of the year to set a baseline for each child. Then the assessment is given again in the spring before the New Mexico Standards Based Assessment (SBA). This helps you and your child's teacher see how much progress has been made between the fall and spring and to determine which areas your child might need assistance with, prior to the SBA. Some examples of Short Cycle Assessments are: the DIBELS, MAPS, DRA, etc. For more information about the types of Short Cycle Assessments used in New Mexico, visit the New Mexico Public Education (NMPED) website:

<http://www.ped.state.nm.us/titleI/dl08/sesTechAssist/district%20Short%20Cycle%20Assessment.pdf>

The New Mexico Standards Based Assessment (SBA)

The SBA is aligned with state performance standards, which lay out what each student should be learning each year. The questions that your child answers are based on content that they should have learned during their current school year.

- In New Mexico, children in grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, and 11 take the Standards Based Assessment. This *does not* mean that children in kindergarten or grades 1, 2, 9, and 10 don't engage in some form of testing. Children who take the SBA also participate in other assessments during the year.
- The SBA "Administration Window" for 2011 is March 21st – April 22nd. This means schools must administer the test at anytime during this period.

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Testing, continued

- There are three types of test items or questions on the SBA:
 - Multiple-choice items, worth one point each;
 - Short-answer questions, worth two points each;
 - Open-ended questions, worth three to four points each.
- The goal for all students is to score at or above the proficient level in each content area. The test breaks down into four performance levels:
 - Beginning Steps: 0 – 29% correct
 - Nearing Proficiency: 30 – 59% correct
 - Proficient: 60 – 84% correct
 - Advanced: 85 – 100% correct
- The SBA is composed of up to five content areas, or subjects, depending on the grade level. They are: Reading, Math, Writing, Science, and Social Studies. Only scores from the Reading and Math portions are used to calculate Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).
- The Standards Based Assessment is the test which the New Mexico Public Education Department uses to calculate AYP. AYP is the *minimum* amount of improvement or progress that schools and school districts must achieve each year towards all children being “proficient.” This is required by the Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Each state sets its own levels of improvement. However, the law states that all children are to reach the proficiency level in Reading and Math by the 2013 – 2014 school year.

For more information about AYP, refer to our “Did You Know” fact sheets:

[DYK #14: What No Child Left Behind Says About Adequate Yearly Progress](#)

[DYK #23: How Adequate Yearly Progress is Measured in New Mexico](#)

Or visit the New Mexico Public Education (NMPED) website:

<http://www.ped.state.nm.us/ayp2009/AYP%20FAQ.pdf>



Test Anxiety

If your child gets stressed out when testing time comes around, here are a few things you can do to help relieve his/her anxiety. Above all, help your child have a positive attitude about the test. If children feel confident they will be able to do their best!

- Talk about the test with your child. Try to find out what he or she is anxious about. Does he think the test will be too hard? Is she worried about competition with other students?
- Make sure your child attends schools on testing days.
- Remind your child not to rush through the test or get distracted while testing.
- Ensure that your child gets plenty of rest the night before.
- Wake your child up early so he/she won't be rushing around in the morning.
- Feed your child a healthy, well-balanced breakfast; avoid sugared cereals or the use of syrup on pancakes, French toast, or waffles.

After the test, celebrate your student's success (go for an ice cream, take a trip to the dollar store, or make a special meal together). Show children that you are proud of their success and progress as this is extremely beneficial to their future success!

For tips on relieving test anxiety, written for teens, you may want to check out this website:

http://kidshealth.org/teen/school_jobs/school/test_anxiety.html

Testing Accommodations

Did you know that your child may be eligible for some testing accommodations? Accommodations are not just for children who receive special education services. Children with 504 plans and students who are English Language Learners (ELL) may also be able to receive accommodations to the testing. In a testing situation, accommodations are changes that are made in the way the test is administered so the child can participate successfully. The purpose of the accommodation is to compensate for a student's disability or language barrier so that the child can show his/her true academic achievement. Some examples of accommodations are: providing large print versions of the test or color overlays; scribing selected response items; reading aloud test items (only on certain sections of the test); using an assistive technology device; and using a picture dictionary or a Spanish-English glossary. An appropriate accommodation is one that is based on the *individual needs* of the student and is already used regularly in the classroom. Accommodations should not be used to give a child an unfair advantage in the testing situation.



Who Should Select Testing Accommodations?

The education team determines the appropriate accommodations for students. **Students with 504 Plans should receive the allowable accommodations in their 504 Accommodations Plans. The decision about appropriate accommodations for students who are English Language Learners (ELL) should be made by the Student Assistance Team (SAT) and the ELL Team or the Language Assessment Team (LAT).** Each school must appoint knowledgeable school personnel to the SAT or LAT to ensure that testing procedures comply with federal and state requirements. Personnel designated to serve on the local school team should include: (1) the student's Bilingual or TESOL-endorsed teacher, (2) the Bilingual Education Program coordinator, (3) the student's other classroom teacher(s), (4) test administrators/coordinators, (5) principal and/or counselor, (6) parent, and (7) student (when appropriate).

For more information, you can go the Public Education website and look at the Accommodation Manual <http://www.ped.state.nm.us/AssessmentAccountability/AssessmentEvaluation/d110/Accommodations%20Manual%20Final%2020101012-30.pdf>

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Farewells and Welcomes

It has been a time of transition at the New Mexico Parent Information Resource Center. In December 2010, Delma Madrigal left the PIRC to take a position with Albuquerque Public Schools at Rio Grande High School. Additionally, Amanda Tower, who had been with the PIRC for over six years, left in February 2011 to pursue other personal and professional aspirations in California. We thank Delma and Amanda for their work with the PIRC and wish them good luck in their future endeavors.

During that same period, we gained two new staff members. Please join us in welcoming Tiffany Barela and Maria Elena Guevara, two new Liaisons with the PIRC, who came on board in November 2010 and January 2011 respectively. At this time we are seeking another Family Liaison to join our team. Stay tuned to find out who our new team member will be.

Dads Do Make a Difference

Children with involved fathers generally do better in school. They make better grades, enjoy school more, and are less likely to be held back a grade or expelled. With numerous research studies showing such positive results, why is it still so uncommon for fathers to be actively involved with their children's education?

Research from the National Child Care Information Center (2010) outlines some of the possible barriers to fathers' involvement in their children's education. These include the following:

- **Attitudes** — Mothers, teachers, caretakers, and others may not be supportive of a father's involvement with his child's education. Education has long been considered a "mommy" area and there may be resistance to change.
- **Language and cultural barriers** — Some fathers may speak a language other than English and feel uncomfortable in the English-dominated school culture. Also, fathers may believe that education should be left to the professionals – the teachers and school staff.
- **The father's level of education** — If a father struggled in school or did not complete school he may feel uncomfortable or embarrassed in the school environment.
- **Work schedules** — Work commitments may prevent fathers from being at the schools during school hours.
- **Not knowing how to become involved** — Fathers may not know the best way to help their children be successful in school. As a result, they do not get involved.



The New Mexico Parent Information Resource Center (PIRC) works with both fathers and school systems to break down these barriers and involve dads in their children's schools in meaningful ways. We offer workshops for men which highlight the importance of fathers in the lives of their children. We help dads discover the many ways they can get involved with their children's education. As we work with schools, we help the staff assess their school's climate and develop ways to make it more welcoming for dads.

Our DYK fact sheet – [*Dads Do Make a Difference \(#26\)*](#) – offers more suggestions for schools and dads. Some ideas for schools include: inviting fathers, grandfathers, and father figures to school events with special invitations; and holding meetings when fathers can attend. For dads, spending time in your child's classroom and offering to share a talent with your child's class can be a great way to be involved.

We have another wonderful way for dads to learn more about becoming an involved father. We invite you to attend the New Mexico Family Leadership Conference which will be held on April 28-29, 2011. For the first time we will be offering a special workshop strand on Fatherhood. During the three breakout sessions, attendees will be able to listen, learn, and actively participate in sessions designed just for dads.

The theme of the strand is **Be the Dad You Want to Be**.

Session One is **Dialogue**. Allan Shedlin will lead this session, drawing participants into a discussion about "dad character" and aspirations.

Session Two is **Practical**. This session will be skills-based and address real world issues. Special guests will be a physician and a teacher who will challenge dads to become advocates for their children. This session will establish a basis for helping dads tell their story.

Session Three is **Tell Your Story**. This session will be led by Hakim Bellamy. It will be a creative and fun time, using poetry and/or bedtime stories.

In addition, REEL FATHERS will be showing the award-winning film *Becoming Eduardo* at the conference. The film explores the world of a teenage delinquent, Eddie Corazon. When an uncle takes Eddie in and becomes his mentor, Eddie begins to change his view of the world - and himself.

For more information about the conference and to register, visit our website at parentsreachingout.org

Spring Break on a Budget



Spring Break is right around the corner and your kids will likely have high hopes for lots of fun and Spring Break activities. Lucky for us, we live in a state rich with culture and many outdoor opportunities. So here are some New Mexico friendly ideas on how to enjoy your Spring Break. A great quality of these ideas is that they are ALL budget friendly!

A frugal Spring Break doesn't have to be a boring Spring Break! In fact, it can be a perfect time to explore your local area and attractions and enjoy nature in transition. Here are some ideas:

- Go for a long nature walk. Turn it into a fun learning experience by having a Spring Scavenger Hunt and looking for signs of spring. New Mexico has tons of great nature trails. See a list here: <http://www.trails.com/stateactivity.aspx?area=10070>
- Play in the rain and splash in puddles! Let it be okay to get dirty!
- Make mud pies or other nature inspired recipes. My daughter will "take my order" and then do her best to make up a recipe using what she can find in nature.
- Spend a day at the library or a bookstore. Some libraries and bookstores have activities or story times. Make sure to pick up a few books to take home and spend a day cuddling and reading together.
- Go camping in your living room! Literally. Put up a tent and bust out the sleeping bags. Put on your pajamas, make S'mores in the microwave, and don't forget to tell ghost stories by flashlight at night!
- Have a movie marathon. Rent or borrow movies from the library or exchange some with family or friends and spend a day eating popcorn and healthy treats. Turn it into an educational experience by discussing characters and the plots of the movies!
- Spring clean! It doesn't have to be all work. Make it fun! Sing songs, have a race to see who can clean a room first, or have a fashion show to clean out winter clothes and make room for warm weather clothes! Put together a box of unused toys to give away.
- Dance-a-thon! If you have a Wii, Playstation, or Xbox game system, you can always rent one of the popular videogames like Dance Central (Xbox), Just Dance (Wii), or Dance Dance Revolution (Playstation) and make it a friendly family competition or just crank up some fun music on the stereo and get your boogie on!
- Have a Game Night. Invite friends and family over to play fun games like Scrabble, Uno, Monopoly, and Pictionary.
- Have an indoor picnic or luau. Grab a beach towel and ball and put on your bathing suit. Make some leis or grass skirts out of string and paper, and accent with flowers.
- Have a Field Day at a local park. Run a race, jump rope, and play tug of war, etc.
- Have a Scavenger Hunt. Look online for ideas, or make up your own!
- Go on a road trip. There are so many National Parks or interesting places to see right here in our own state. One of my kids' favorite Spring Breaks ever was spent at White Sands and City of Rocks in southern New Mexico. Who would have ever thought dirt and rocks could be so fun!
- Give back. Volunteer in your community.



*Spring is nature's way of saying,
"Let's party!"*

Robin Williams

The Status of No Child Left Behind (NCLB)/Elementary Secondary Education Act (ESEA)

No Child Left Behind (NCLB) is the 2001 reauthorization of the Elementary Secondary Education Act, which was originally authorized in 1965. The NCLB Act is the law through which the nation's 62 Parent Information Resource Centers (PIRCs) receive their funding to assist families, Local Education Agencies (LEAs), and State Education Agencies (SEAs) as they work on developing family engagement at a school or district level. Parents Reaching Out is the home of the Parent Information Resource Center of New Mexico.

With the looming reauthorization of the ESEA, the PIRCs are now faced with the possibility of not existing next year due to budget cuts. For more information about the status of the reauthorization of the ESEA and the fate of the PIRCs we suggest you visit the government website: <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/blueprint/index.html>





April 28 – 29, 2011

New Mexico Family Leadership Conference

Isleta Conference Center

11000 Broadway SE

Albuquerque, NM

This year's Conference will offer strands on:

- Early Childhood
- Health
- General Education
- Special Education
- Fatherhood

and a Spanish strand







[Click here](#) for more information and to register.