

Dear Parents/Guardians,

August 25, 2008

Your child will be taking very important tests this school year. The ISTEP + will be given statewide between September 15th and September 26th. Your child's teacher will be reviewing skills he/she has already learned and will be tested over. We encourage you to continue this review at home with the ideas your child's teacher suggests. Please talk to your child about the importance of these tests and how he/she feels about them. We have provided the following information to help you. To view the state standards that your child will be tested over visit www.doe.state.in.us and click on ISTEP + Samplers for a specific grade.

Easing Pre-Test Jitters

It's normal for kids to get anxious before a significant test. This is actually a good thing. That adrenaline boost can be helpful, but it can be hard to obtain and *maintain* that perfect level of nervousness. If your child is overly worried in your opinion, try these tips:

Reassure your child

Tell your child that the test will be used to evaluate how well a school or school district is educating its students. It's important for kids to have a sense of the broader context.

Put the test in perspective

Explain that test scores are looked at along with many other pieces of information in determining your child's achievement level. Students' grades and progress over time, for example, are also very important. This may be a big test, but it is till *one* test!

Take a deep breath

If your child is a very nervous test-taker, have him/her do deep breathing exercises before the test. He/she can take a deep breath and count to ten. Then have him/her take shorter deep breaths in between passages or sections of the test – counting to three only. This exercise is fast and simple, but it really works!

Discuss what to expect

Go over with your child when and where the test will be given. Make sure s/he knows what will generally be covered on the test and roughly how long it will take to finish it. Your child's teacher will share this information with him/her in class.

Make sure your child gets enough rest

Make sure your child will be comfortable and alert each day of testing. S/he should get a good night's sleep the night before and a light breakfast the morning of a test. (A heavy breakfast can make you sleepy.)

Dress in layers

Have your child dress comfortably in layers so s/he can take cloths off or put them on, depending on the temperature of the room.

Pack a snack

Even if your child doesn't normally have a snack time during the school day, s/he may be allowed to have one if there's a break during the test. Pack him/her a light nutritious snack, but avoid salty foods may make him/her thirsty later in the testing session.

Finally, tell your child that the test will have some difficult questions on it. All of the questions are not supposed to be easy. Explain that s/he may not be able to answer all of the questions, and that's expected. All s/he can do is try his/her best, and that's okay!

Test-Taking Tips

It's ok to be a little nervous. It's only natural to be a little nervous when taking an important test like ISTEP+. Being a little nervous can actually help you do your very best on the test.

Skip problems you can't solve right away. It's all right to skip problems you don't know how to do, or you are not sure of. You can go back and do the problems you skipped after you have answered all the problems you know on that specific test.

Lightly circle the problems you skip. Lightly circle the number of any problems you skip. This lets you see which problems are unfinished in case you have time to go back and work on them. Be sure to circle the number *lightly*.

Go with your first choice. It is usually best to go with the answers you choose first when you have a strong feeling about one of the answer choices but are not sure it is the correct one. It is usually best to go with a strong initial hunch even if you finish early and have time to go back and review. The exception would be a math computation error.

Eliminate answers you know are wrong. When you do not have a strong feeling about the correct answer, you need use test-taking skills such as elimination of wrong answers. For example, if the problem is $2,301 \times 5$, the answer must end in 5 because $5 \times 1 = 5$. You can quickly eliminate all answers that do not end in 5, and choose from those that do.

Estimate on math test. When there is only a minute or two left and you still have a number of problems to complete, estimate to speed up your process. For example, if the problem is $399 + 399$, don't try to add it up. Quickly round off the numbers to $400 + 400$, which equals 800. Find the answer closest to and less than 800. Then move quickly to the next problem.

Erase carefully and completely. Completely erase mistakes and lightly circled problems you skipped. It is extremely important to make sure that you have a good eraser to use. Avoid hard erasers; they are excellent at making holes. Also avoid all that are dirty or black, which smear rather than erase.

Watch for tricks. The test makers also try to trick you with certain kinds of false but apparently correct answers to test questions. For example, in a test question calling for you to add two numbers, the test may include among the answer choices what the answer would be if the two numbers were subtracted. If you are not paying attention and subtract rather than add, you will be tricked into selecting the wrong answers. Pay close attention to the specific operation called for in each item on the test, and whenever permits, double-check your answers.