

Ways Busy Families *Can* Help Children Succeed *on* Standardized Tests



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SAMPLE

About the presentations

Your Ways Busy Families Can Help Children Succeed on Standardized Tests Resource Kit includes three presentations in two formats. You have the option of playing the included videos so your audience can watch the narrated version, or you can narrate the PowerPoint version of the presentations yourself and add your own commentary to the scripts provided.

The three PowerPoint presentations included are:

- ***12 Ways Busy Families Can Help Children Succeed on Standardized Tests*** (see Section 2)
- ***Reading Skills for Test Success*** (see Section 3)
- ***Listening and Following Directions for Test Success*** (see Section 4)

Consider showing the PowerPoint presentations:

- At your back-to-school night or other school event.
- While families wait to meet with teachers for conferences.
- During a parent-teacher meeting.
- In your school counselor's office.

Leader's Guide

12 Ways Busy Families Can Help Children Succeed on Standardized Tests

This 45- to 60-minute meeting covers all 12 key points identified in a national survey of education leaders about the most important things families can do to prepare their children to succeed on standardized tests.

Get families to attend your meeting

Section 6 of this kit contains a variety of ready-to-use materials to help you get the word out about your meeting.

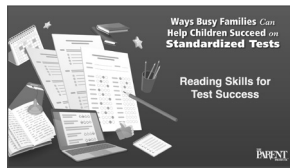
Here is the suggested agenda:

45- to 60-Minute Meeting Agenda <i>12 Ways Busy Families Can Help Children Succeed on Standardized Tests</i>	
Minutes	Activity
2	Welcome; introduction.
20	View the presentation.
3	Distribute family handout, "12 Ways Busy Families Can Help Children Succeed on Standardized Tests."
10 to 13	<p>Open Discussion Topic #1. Participants select their three top priority ideas to discuss from the handout summarizing the main points from the opening presentation.</p> <p><i>"Looking at the summary handout of main ideas from today's presentation, what do you think are the three most useful suggestions to help your child succeed in school and on standardized tests?"</i></p> <p>Invite participants to think for a moment, look at the handout summarizing the key points of the presentation and then share the suggestions they selected and why they selected them. Try to include everyone in the discussion. Record the top ideas on a chalkboard or easel pad so everyone can see them.</p> <p>The objective is to get families to think about and express in their own words why the suggestions they selected are so important to student learning and test success—and how they can carry them out at home.</p>
8 to 10	<p>Open Discussion Topic #2. Meeting leader selects discussion questions for an idea discussed in the presentation that has not already been discussed in Topic #1.</p> <p>See "Suggested Discussion Questions" for each of the 12 main ideas presented in the presentation (following this agenda).</p> <p>Ask a question—or questions—to start the discussion about the idea you have selected from the presentation and try to get as many families as possible to participate in the discussion.</p>
(Optional) 8 to 10	Optional Open Discussion Topic #3. As in Open Discussion Topic #2 above, meeting leader selects questions to discuss about another priority idea in the presentation.
2	Closing comments, evaluation & adjourn.
45 to 60	Total time

Presenter's script

Reading Skills for Test Success

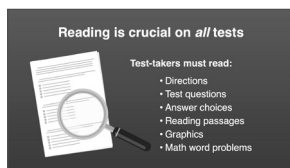
This presenter's script provides suggested wording if you wish to personally narrate the *Reading Skills for Test Success* PowerPoint presentation found in the online portal. You are, of course, free to modify the script to make the words your own, adding or deleting information as you choose. You may make changes in the presentation as well. Please note, however, that under the resource kit license, you may use the modifications only for your own school presentation use. The presentation is written to run for about six minutes, depending on the speed at which the narrative is delivered.



Slide 1
(Opening slide, no narration.)



Slide 2
Hello! I'm _____ and I want to thank you for being here today. **[+]** We're going to talk about how schools and families can work together to improve children's reading skills. **[+]** Strong reading skills will help your child do well in school—and on standardized tests.



Slide 3
Reading is important on all tests—not just reading tests. Students must be able to read **[+]** the directions, **[+]** the test questions and **[+]** the answer choices. On reading tests, they need to read **[+]** passages and answer comprehension questions. On some tests, they will have to read **[+]** graphics, such as charts and graphs. Students also need to read **[+]** word problems on math tests. So what can you do at home to improve your child's reading skills?



Slide 4
First, you can manage your child's recreational screen time—time spent watching TV, playing video games, or using the internet for recreational purposes. Managing screen time is easier if you use a few simple strategies.
[+] Many schools are using digital devices like tablets for schoolwork. Help your children understand the difference between using a device for schoolwork and for recreation.
[+] Then, aim for a balance of online and offline activities. Offline activities can include things like family time, homework time and playtime. Once you've carved out time for offline activities, your child may not have much time left for recreational screen time.
[+] Also, set aside time each day for your child to read. Put reading time on a calendar, or have your child make a flier to post on the refrigerator reminding the family when it's time to read.
[+] Put a bookshelf or book basket—not a TV—in your child's room. Visit the library regularly to keep your child supplied with fresh reading material.
[+] Finally, the American Academy of Pediatrics recommends creating a family media plan. This plan helps families set priorities related to media use. A customizable plan is available in English and Spanish on the American Academy of Pediatrics website.

Discussion questions for Listening and Following Directions for Test Success

Open discussion question

“Looking at the summary handout of main ideas from today’s presentation, which single suggestion do you feel would most help you improve your child’s ability to listen and follow directions?”

Key Point in Presentation	Suggested Discussion Questions
<p>1. Be a good listening model for your child.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Beyond just nodding or saying things like “I see,” what are some other ways you can show that you are really listening when your child talks to you? • When you are speaking, how can you tell that your child is really listening to what you have to say? Can you use any of those approaches when listening to your child? • When you are talking with your boss, an older person you respect or someone you are meeting for the first time, how do you show them that you are listening carefully to what they are saying? Can you use any of those approaches when listening to your child?
<p>2. Practice “active listening” together.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Have you ever tried the “active listening” technique described in the presentation? • What are some advantages of the “active listening” approach in teaching children to listen carefully? • What would you say are the biggest reasons any of us—adults or children—don’t listen carefully?
<p>3. Play the “10 Questions” TV game.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The presentation suggests using the “10 Questions” game while watching TV with your child. Can you think of other situations requiring listening where the same game would also work? • Can you think of a question you could ask us right now about the opening presentation we just heard to see how well we were listening?



Help your child overcome test anxiety

It's normal for students to get a little nervous before a big test, but some children experience excessive test anxiety. They worry so much about taking the test that their performance suffers. While it may be helpful to simply tell your child to relax, there are other things you can do to help diffuse those pre-test jitters. You can:

- **Make sure your child** knows what to expect, such as what subjects it will cover and what types of questions it will include. Have your child complete practice questions or tests if the teacher sends any home.
- **Show your child how to relax.** Some children find it helpful to close their eyes and take a few deep breaths before starting a test. Others like to visualize a relaxing place, such as the beach. Encourage your child to keep a positive outlook and visualize doing well on the test.
- **Make sure your child has the supplies needed** before the test—pencils, pens, paper, a calculator (if permitted) and other items suggested by the teacher. Having the right equipment means your child has one less thing to worry about.
- **Teach your child** to use positive self-talk. Your child can say, “I learned a lot this year, and I’m ready. I know I will do well.”
- **Acknowledge your child’s anxiety.** Don’t say there’s nothing to be nervous about. But do point out that your child has worked hard all year and the teacher has prepared students to succeed on this test.
- **Remind your child** that test scores aren’t everything. Other things are also important—things such as having a strong attendance record, a positive attitude and completing assignments, for example. Test scores are just one part of the big picture.
- **Remind your child** of past success on standardized tests or classroom tests.
- **Avoid comparing your child’s scores to others.** Your child’s performance on a standardized test isn’t a contest. If you are anxious and put pressure on your child, it will only increase anxiety.
- **Help your child keep things in perspective.** Point out that it’s important to do *your* best, not be *the* best. Assure your child that your love is not dependent on test grades.

Ideas for reaching hard-to-reach families

Year after year, educators say one of their biggest challenges is finding ways to involve “hard-to-reach” families. Too often, it’s the same group of families who attend every school event, come to parent-teacher conferences and volunteer to help with school projects. And usually their children are not the ones who need the most help.

Research shows that when families are involved in their children’s education, those children do better in school, regardless of the age of the child, the parent’s educational level or even the family’s socioeconomic status. Social workers and family counseling professionals report that virtually all families—no matter what their circumstances—love their children and want to help them.

Many families are so exhausted simply trying to survive, working long hours and multiple jobs, struggling to support others, that they cannot be involved in their child’s education in traditional ways.

Still, the stakes are high. If we are to do an adequate job educating children, we must find ways to involve all families. The secret is to be available, creative, understanding—and to adapt.

Following are 30 of the best ideas for reaching hard-to-reach families, compiled by the editors at The Parent Institute:

1. **Establish family resource** centers at school and in community centers.
2. **Send learning activities home** for families to use with their children. There is something special about kits, bags or boxes sent home from school.
3. **Look into using radio programs** and public service announcements.
4. **Remember that personal, face-to-face contact** is the best way to get non-English speaking families involved. Find ways to have someone who speaks their home language meet with families face-to-face.
5. **Have school staff** outside the school during the mornings and afternoons to greet families.
6. **Arrange for interpreters** at school meetings and conferences. Let families know that interpreters are available. Bilingual parents may be able to serve as interpreters.
7. **Be willing to try** new approaches. Read about successful ideas used by other schools.
8. **Remember the essentials** of child care, transportation and meals when planning family engagement activities.
9. **Make sure families** have ample opportunity to learn about school expectations. Give out information. Organize workshops. Issue personal invitations to meetings and conferences.
10. **Recognize that all families** understand their children better than anyone and want to do their best to help them succeed.
11. **Respect the way families** are rearing their children. Encourage them to build on their traditions by adding some practices that will better prepare their children for success in school.



Sample invitation: Listening and Following Directions

Sometimes a simple note is all it takes to encourage families to attend a meeting at your school. Here's a sample invitation to send home. A customizable version of this resource, which you can adapt to your needs, is available in the online portal.

You're invited to a meeting where you will learn practical ideas that you can use at home—on your own time—to help your child succeed on standardized tests:

Listening and Following Directions For Test Success

Please join us for this special presentation.

Date:

Time:

Location:

You're invited to a meeting where you will learn practical ideas that you can use at home—on your own time—to help your child succeed on standardized tests:

Listening and Following Directions For Test Success

Please join us for this special presentation.

Date:

Time:

Location:

You're invited to a meeting where you will learn practical ideas that you can use at home—on your own time—to help your child succeed on standardized tests:

Listening and Following Directions For Test Success

Please join us for this special presentation.

Date:

Time:

Location:



Inform the press about your meeting on reading

Here's a sample press release. A customizable version of this resource, which you can adapt to your needs, is available in the online portal.

For Immediate Release: **Contact Name, phone number, email**
Month/Date/Year

(Name of School) Uses Latest Family Engagement Research to Highlight Ways Busy Families Can Help Build Reading Skills for Test Success

Meeting will focus on the critical link between family engagement and student achievement with dozens of easy ideas families can use immediately.

(City, STATE)—There is no question that standardized tests are more important than ever. Schools are working hard to make sure students learn—and demonstrate that learning on standardized tests. But schools can't do it alone. Families must also get involved. And there's a lot even busy families can do at home to boost their children's academic achievement. Now **(school name)** will provide ideas from national experts that families can use to help their children do their best on tests.

(School name) will be hosting a meeting on:
Reading Skills for Test Success

Date: _____ Time: _____ Location: _____

The event will include:

- A video presentation discussing practical tips busy families can use to help their children succeed on standardized tests.
- Tips on ways busy families can surround their children with learning right at home and help their children do well in school—and on tests.
- Tools for families—handouts even the busiest families can use to help their children starting now!

Anne Henderson, a nationwide expert in family engagement in education for more than 40 years, said, "When schools work together with families to support learning, children tend to succeed not just in school, but throughout life."

Contact **(name)** at the number above for more information.

40 top ideas from education leaders

As leading experts in the field of family engagement for more than 30 years, The Parent Institute has heard from many education leaders. Here is what they've had to say about what they're doing to get families involved in helping their children succeed on standardized tests:

Top answers from education leaders

1. **Inform families about the purpose** of assessments and how schools use that information. Tell families how standardized test scores impact their children and your school.
2. **Remind families of their important role.** They are not expected to teach specific skills, rather they are to monitor that assignments are completed, that children have regular bedtime and morning routines, and that children read every day. Every parent, regardless of home language or educational or income level, can promote a positive attitude about school and learning.
3. **Share test success strategies** in your newsletter and on your school website. Send a special "Test Express" newsletter right before important standardized tests.
4. **Build enthusiasm.** Play games, give prizes and focus on the excitement of each child doing their best. Adopt a motivational theme or slogan to post around the school.
5. **Show families what the test looks like.** Some families may not be familiar with the formats used for standardized tests. When the families are more comfortable with the format, their children will be, too.
6. **Send a letter informing families** when tests are coming up and why they are important.
7. **Host family information sessions.** Try an evening meeting, a morning coffee or a "block party." Explain grade-level standards, answer questions and share ways families can help children prepare.
8. **Provide a free breakfast** at school on test days. Provide water and protein snacks during the day.
9. **Provide online practice tests** that children can take at home.
10. **Provide after-school or Saturday tutoring** for at-risk students.
11. **Inform families about the importance** of standardized tests—from the first day of school. Don't wait until the month before the tests.
12. **Incorporate test-taking strategies** in regular assignments.
13. **Talk with families about standardized tests** during parent-teacher conferences.
14. **Use automated calls or texts** to remind families of important test dates and information.
15. **Inform families about the value** of providing support for schoolwork. Students who do well day-to-day are likely to do well on standardized tests.
16. **Encourage strong attendance for all students**—especially on test days. Ask families to schedule medical and other appointments when school is not in session.
17. **Send home booklets** that explain standardized testing to families.
18. **Interpret test results for families.** One-on-one meetings may take time, but they do get families involved.

Family engagement research summary

This document provides brief summaries of the pertinent family engagement research on which the *Ways Busy Families Can Help Children Succeed on Standardized Tests* Resource Kit is based. Complete reference citations are included for those who would like more information.

1. Informing parents and guardians about tests and testing procedures contributes to student success on tests.

Bradley T. Erford and Cheryl Moore-Thomas, “Testing FAQ: How to Answer Questions Parents Frequently Ask About Testing,” Chapter 39 in *Measuring Up: Assessment Issues for Teachers, Counselors, and Administrators*, ERIC Counseling and Student Services Clearinghouse.

2. Children who spent time reading for pleasure did better on tests of cognitive achievement than those who did not read for pleasure.

Sandra L. Hoffert and John F. Sandberg, “How American Children Spend Their Time,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, National Council on Family Relations.

3. The University of Michigan’s Institute for Social Research found that for every extra hour of reading done each week, test scores rose by 0.5 points while for every additional five hours of watching TV, test scores were 0.5 points lower.

Sandra L. Hoffert and John F. Sandberg, “How American Children Spend Their Time,” *Journal of Marriage and the Family*, National Council on Family Relations.

4. There appears to be a positive impact of eating breakfast on various cognitive skills in the short term.

Howard Taras, “Nutrition and Student Performance at School,” *Journal of School Health*, Blackwell Publishing, a division of J. Wiley & Sons.

5. The household media environment is significantly associated with students’ performance on the standardized tests.

Dina L. Borzekowski, Ed.D. and Thomas N. Robinson, M.D., “The Remote, the Mouse and the No. 2 Pencil,” *Archives of Pediatrics & Adolescent Medicine*, American Medical Association.

6. Although there has been no nationally representative study on the topic, small scale district and school level studies suggest that lack of sleep reduces attendance, increases tardiness, and lowers grades of adolescent students. Furthermore, lack of sleep in youth is correlated with health and behavioral problems such as moodiness, depression, difficulty controlling behavior, and increased frustration, all of which make learning in school difficult.

Mark H. Showalter, “The Economics of Sleep: An Application to Student Achievement.” Social Science Research Network.