

TESTING SEASON IS UPON US

With this particular issue of *The People's Defender*, we are now beyond the mid-point for the month of February. There are less than two weeks left before the month of March rolls in. What is so significant about this? After all, there is still one-third of the school year remaining before the summer break arrives in June. Nevertheless, the arrival of March means one thing to students, teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents. I'm not talking about the State Basketball Tournaments. I am leading up to the importance of the advent of March, as it marks the beginning of the most concentrated month or period of time for administering state-mandated tests to students in schools all across Ohio.

During the first full week of March, all sophomores will take all five parts of the Ohio Graduation Tests (OGT), as well as any juniors who still need to pass one or more parts of the OGT to meet one of the requirements for graduation. Seniors who still need to pass one or more parts of the Ohio Proficiency Tests (OPT) will have an opportunity to successfully clear this hurdle toward graduation during the month of March. Also, during March, various Achievement Tests will be administered to students in grades three through eight. Obviously, if you have any questions about testing dates for your own child, you should contact the principal or counselor where your child attends school.

One thing that I am very encouraged about regarding testing is the shift in dates for the Achievement Tests in grades 3-8. Beginning with the 2006-2007 school year, State Achievement Tests administration will be moved for our younger students until the end

of April and early May. This makes sense to me as an educator. The Third Grade Reading Achievement Test will continue to have both a fall and a spring administration. Likewise, the OGT test dates will continue to be October and March.

As a parent of a child who may be taking one or more of these tests, you may be wondering what you can do to help your child perform at a higher level on these tests. Unfortunately, this isn't a quick fix process. You can't go to your local pharmacist and purchase a magical potion to help your child. There is no Great Wizard to seek out. It's a systemic process that began the first day that you decided to start reading to (and eventually reading with) your child. I've known parents who started this practice almost as soon as their children were born. For some, this process began with the first day at preschool or Head Start. For others, the journey possibly began with the first day at kindergarten. At any rate, real learning and retention of learning is a lifelong process. There are no "quick fixes or miracle cures."

So, what can parents do to help their children succeed in school? Number 1: ALWAYS stress that school and education are extremely important and that the two go hand-in-hand. The world is not the same world in which you and I grew up. It is flat, and the competition for jobs throughout the world is fierce. A good education is a must. Attendance at school on a regular basis is so important that I cannot overstate this. Your children need to know that their parents understand this and are very interested in what their children learn at school each day.

Number 2: ALWAYS make it a point to attend the Parent-Teacher Conferences at your child's school. It doesn't matter how old or young your child is, he/she needs to know that you care enough to go to the school three to four times a year to check on their progress. This is another key ingredient in your child's school success.

Number 3: ALWAYS make sure that your child is getting enough exercise, proper diet, and rest. These three pieces of the puzzle are very important to the overall success of your child in school. Too much of anything is bad for a child, whether it is junk food, Nintendo games, or mashed potatoes.

Number 4: ALWAYS make sure that your child has a good breakfast before classes begin each day. This part doesn't have to take place at home. Every child in our school district is provided a nutritious breakfast at school through the Universal Breakfast Program. It's free! So, it is not a problem if you don't have the time to prepare breakfast at home.

Number 5: ALWAYS make it a point to know who your child's friends are, where they are, what they are doing, and as much as possible, what kinds of ideas or goals they have about school and life. Believe me, bad habits start earlier and earlier, and it becomes more difficult to intervene and correct children as they get older.

Raising and educating a child to be successful in the world of today, and the future, is an awesome assignment for those of us from the adult world. Failing in this task is truly not

an option in today's flat world. Working together, we can succeed. And, it is never too early to get started. Good luck to all of our students during testing month. I'll return to my discussion of our upcoming bond issue in my next article. Thank you.

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Superintendent