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Principal's Post

About Teaching and Learning

Recently much has been written about the negative aspects of testing. And admittedly, too much testing can be detrimental to children and to schools. But standardized tests yield valuable and important data that directly affects all facets of the educational spectrum.

Between February 26 and March 4, all students in grades 3 through 7 will take the Terra Nova tests. Terra Nova is the most widely used standardized assessment test in the nation's public, private and parochial schools.

A standardized test is any form of assessment where the groups, the conditions, and the questions are as uniform as possible. The test items are derived from standards. Standards are learning objectives or learning targets. They are short written descriptions of what students should know, understand and be able to do at a given grade level in a given subject. For example, the 4th grade Social Studies Terra Nova Test is comprised of a wide range of questions that would include all the concepts/skills that would/could be covered in Social Studies at the 4th grade level.

The Terra Nova tests enable us to monitor the overall effectiveness of our school program as well the progress of each student. The tests results are norm referenced. That is, a student's score is determined through a comparison with other students of the same age/grade in the archdiocese, the region and the nation who have taken the same tests. The data from Terra Nova tests drives school decisions about individual students, instructional strategies and schoolwide programs.

Test results give important information about an individual student's strengths and weaknesses within each specific subject. For example, a student may be strong in addition and subtraction skills but weak in multiplication and division skills. So re-teaching and practice opportunities are indicated.

Test results enable teachers to view an entire class's performance on a particular skill or a concept and to determine the need to advance or to remediate. The teacher can see that the entire class is weak in multiplication and division. She responds by re-teaching the skills, perhaps using differing strategies and different materials for the entire class.

For the whole school the data from these tests is used to analyze each subject to determine learning goals, and to decide on topics for professional development. By comparing test results from year to year, we can track progress toward meeting short term goals, and define next steps in our overarching goal of continuous improvement of teaching and learning for the benefit of all students.

Source: <http://edglossary.org/>