



# LEADING THE JOURNEY

An E-newsletter on *EXCELLENCE* in Leadership

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## Standardized Tests

*Leadership, NAD Principals' Handbook (excerpt)*

A standardized testing program assists the school in measuring student learning and planning for improvement, and provides accountability to stakeholders. The principal must lead faculty in reviewing and analyzing test data, while ensuring appropriate use for

decisions about student learning and program improvements. This may occur through a designated testing coordinator or a small committee appointed to assist in planning and implementing the testing program. The principal should regularly reference testing data in reports to various stakeholder groups.

Read more <http://adventisteducation.org/principals-handbook/>

## Test Results and School Improvement

*Stephen Zurek, Associate Superintendent  
Southeastern California Conference*

As part of any school improvement process, assessment results need to be examined and evaluated. This can sound daunting and very difficult because data can be overwhelming to examine. Percentiles, stanines, standard scores and grade equivalents can be frightening, but when school scores are broken down into the simplest form, the assessment data can provide valuable school information that can improve instruction and learning for students. Three strategies of using test data can result in greater achievement for all students.

**First strategy: look at the school's building summary scores, which show how the school performed in each grade compared to the nation.** This data reveals the strengths and weaknesses of the achievement of all students tested. However, one year's assessment results may not provide an accurate picture of student achievement. If possible, compare the last three years of assessment results. What trends are revealed in the scores? Do you see areas of strength and weakness? Share your findings with the staff and faculty. This vital step must take place before any plans are made, because the school improvement process must be collaborated with all school personnel. Once teachers and staff have reviewed and discussed the assessment data, you are ready to move forward with the school improvement process and develop steps that address areas of concern.

The first step is to develop an action plan that addresses the area of concern. Let us say a school decides to look at Math because the assessment scores are the lowest of the core subjects tested. First, make your goals and objectives. What do you want to accomplish? What will it look like to move forward to obtain the goal? After you make your goals and objectives, create strategies. Let us say the school decides that every grade needs to score half a grade level higher in Math than the last three years. How will this be achieved? Maybe a school will decide to take 15 minutes in each faculty meeting to discuss best practices in the teaching of Math. Perhaps the school will invest in outside resources to present practical suggestions on the teaching of Math. Perhaps the school will provide time for teachers to observe other teachers as they teach Math and then report their findings at faculty meeting. Perhaps the school will invest in Math manipulatives for all grade

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## Academic Excellence

*Toakase Vunileva, Principal, Mile High Academy, Colorado*

In 2012, Mile High Academy was wrestling with how to improve standardized test scores. The average ACT score from 2008 to 2012 was a 19. It was imperative to our students' success that we look at ways to improve our ACT/SAT scores. While there are many factors to consider, the following steps were taken to ensure a strong future for our students.

1. Strong math & English teachers for our high school
2. Awareness starting in the 3rd grade that the ACT/SAT was important
3. Three days during IOWA Tests for 11th and 12th grade to participate in ACT Prep
4. 8th through 10th grade students took the Explore & Plan Act Prep Tests
5. Review of data that was supplied with ACT results to adjust our classes offered
6. Program to increase the reading ability of our low performing readers
7. Professional Development for all teachers

In December of 2013, just 6 months after our seniors took the ACT, our average moved from a 19 to a 25. We have since added a College & Career class for all 11th grade students, ACT Prep for one trimester, ASPIRE testing for 3rd through 9th grade, PreACT for 10th grade, eight AP classes, Road Mapping for 6th through 12th, Suzuki pedagogy for preschool through 5th grade, flexible seating, and 21st century skills through project-based learning. Our average ACT score has stayed steady at a 25 for students taking the ACT and our top 25% have a score of 34.

I set out with two goals in mind when I arrived at MHA in 2012 as the new principal: improve the academics and bring Jesus to the forefront of who we are as a school. God has brought us a long way, and with the support of our community, committed and dedicated teachers, we have set our sights on preparing our students to have 21st century skills like creativity, collaboration, critical thinking, and communication as well as continued improvement in the area of standardized tests. Our enrollment has also doubled since 2012 from 138 to 240 students, which is the

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# Marketing Through Standardized Test Scores

*Aimee Leukert, Assistant Director  
Center for Research on K-12 Adventist Education*

Now that your students have taken their standardized tests and the results are in – what do you do with them? Besides using them internally to assess strengths and weakness across your campus and developing targeted teaching strategies, sharing test scores with your community and constituency can also be an incredibly effective way to market your school.

Here are some steps you can take to utilize test scores in your marketing campaign:

- First, ensure **that you and your staff are clear** about what your school's data means. Devote a staff meeting to discussing this year's test results. Where are your strengths? Where are your weaknesses? What generalizations can be inferred? What patterns can be identified?
- From this discussion, **write down a few key, but succinct talking points** that can be used and referenced in parent-teacher conferences and on printed marketing materials. Provide each of your staff with a copy of these points so that your team is all communicating the same message to parents and community members.

- **Post data on your website.** Prospective parents use a school's website to "shop" for their child's future place of education and many look specifically for each campus's test results. It is the *rule* rather than the exception these days for schools to have a page on their website dedicated to data and test results.
- Include **highlights from your school's most recent test scores** into all marketing materials. A postcard that is mailed out to prospective families should include at least one bullet point about test results; a brochure should have even more. Make sure, however, that the data you're conveying is easy to read and jargon-free; charts or graphs are usually quite effective.
- Do not wait for marketing opportunities to come to you. **Take the initiative** and reach out to local media outlets – your community newspaper, local radio station, Chamber of Commerce, etc. Standardized test results are hotly debated in public education circles, so it is a "language" that most use and understand. Get in on that discussion and share the results from your school!

The bottom line is – do not shy away from using your school's test results to your advantage. If you are able to communicate them in a clear, articulate, and relevant manner, test scores can be used as an excellent tool in your marketing campaign. ☸

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## Test Results (continued)

levels and will intentionally teach Math for understanding rather than just memorization. Whatever the steps your school decides to incorporate into the school improvement plan, all steps need to be agreed upon by all school personnel.

Once the action plan to improve Math instruction is implemented, the plan needs to be constantly revisited and revised as needed. Do not think that in one year you will reach your goal of raising Math scores half a grade level in all grades. Such a goal will take time.

**Second strategy: provide the class summary results to the previous year's teacher.** Some may be apprehensive of this strategy, because it seems as though the test data is being used to evaluate teachers. However, this approach for using test data to improve student learning is for self-evaluation; an opportunity for teachers to see where the classes' strengths and weaknesses lay. Obviously, this is done in a multi-grade setting. It is good to see how last year's students perform once they leave the classroom and move on to the next multi-grade classroom. As mentioned in the previous strategy, the more years you can self-evaluate, the more you can see the bigger picture regarding student achievement. Once the teacher has the data information, and after working with the principal or superintendent, a professional growth plan can be developed that addresses the areas of growth for student achievement.

**Third strategy: check for appropriate academic growth across all grade levels and all subject areas.** The management system that comes with the Iowa assessment results is easy to manipulate to find this information. This data shows a line graph from year to year and how a grade has performed in every subject area. You should see each grade achieve one grade level year to year. For

example, if a fourth grade class last year scored 4.6 grade equivalent in reading, then it is expected that this year the 5th graders would score at least 5.6 grade equivalent, thus one year academic growth in reading. For best results, use this strategy with the other approaches to using data to drive school improvement.

Through these three strategies, a school can use assessment data to improve student learning. It is a process that does not reap results quickly. However, it is very rewarding for a school to be working together to accomplish a vital goal of raising student achievement on campus. Secondly, for a teacher in a classroom, using test data to guide instruction is what it means to be a professional educator. In the end, educators want students to achieve. Educators want students to reach their full potential. As educators, we will do all that we can to help students be academically successful. ☸

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## Academic Excellence (continued)

result of moving toward our goal of academic excellence and a school that is centered on Jesus. We are constantly analyzing our data, thinking creatively about how we educate the 21st century students, and creating ways to improve their learning through diverse instruction, because we know that they are going to be doing jobs that have not yet been created. Is standardized testing the most important thing we do as a school? No, but it is the indicator to the world that academics at Mile High Academy is striving for excellence, and that our students are prepared for both college and a career.

The most important piece is your teaching staff and their passion for modeling what it means to learn. Invest in them and they will change your school. ☸

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