

The argument:

# THERE'S TOO MUCH TESTING

What's at the heart of it? Parents want their kids to get the maximum benefit from their education, and some fear that testing takes away from classroom learning.

# FIRST

FIND COMMON GROUND.

Whether or not it's true, most people think it is, so you're fighting a losing battle. It's best to agree.

"You're probably right and there are a lot of reasons for that. The new Common Core tests are meant to improve the situation."

# THEN

PIVOT TO A HIGHER EMOTION: PEACE OF MIND.

"While there may be too much testing in some schools, we sure wouldn't want to have no way of measuring progress. Parents want to know how their kids are doing, and they need a objective measuring stick. These new tests provide parents with the information they want and need."

## DOs ↑

- 1 Do position new tests as a solution, not the problem. Distinguish between adding more tests and replacing old tests.

"We know there are a lot of problems with tests. These tests were designed to address some of them. Many of the old tests being used today don't provide parents and teachers with useful information. The new Common Core tests do. This isn't about adding another test. It's about replacing old tests with something better."

- 2 Do suggest the simple act of talking to the teacher. "Challenging the district" "get involved" can overwhelm parents.

## DON'Ts ↓

- 1 Don't overpromise. Don't position new tests as the end all, be all.

"Are they perfect? No. But they're better. Will the problem of too much testing go away overnight? No. But these tests will help."

- 2 Don't overwhelm parents. This isn't a call to action.

"Get involved! Challenge your district! Educate yourself on all the many different kinds of tests your kids are taking and take action!"

## DO-DON'Ts ↕

Do use analogies when they can help normalize and simplify complicated ideas. But don't overuse at them the expense of straight talk.

## WHAT ABOUT EXTREME EXAMPLES?

Do acknowledge extreme examples and call them out for what they are.

"My child is tested every other week. That's all they do is prepare for and take tests!"

"That does sound like a lot, but it's not what's going on in most schools. Before you throw the baby out with the bathwater, talk to your teacher and learn about the tests your child is taking. Some are part of everyday lessons. Some are state or district tests. Some might provide you with more useful information than others. Don't miss out on the new tests that help you really know how your child is doing at school."



## WATCH OUT FOR RABBIT HOLES!

Different tests get introduced by different local, district, and state agencies. Don't pick sides or favorites, or lay blame. Agree that some tightening up is in order, then pivot back to how testing helps parents and kids. There are some legit reasons for using different tests. But trying to explain the technicalities can work against you, reinforcing the belief that it's all too complicated.

## AUDIENCE SHIFTS

### BUSINESS

Accountability, costs, and ROI are all topics that can be of interest to business groups. But don't forget, business people are parents, too.

"For what we're spending on testing, they're actually a very cheap way of measuring accountability. They're an excellent return on investment. But more importantly, they provide parents with an objective measure of their child's progress."

### PARENTS

The closer you get to parents, the more the message should be about "your child."



The argument:

## WE CAN'T TREAT SCHOOLS LIKE BUSINESSES

What's at the heart of it? To some, accountability is ruthless and cutthroat. They think it's not fair because businesses can eliminate stuff that's hard or under-performing, while schools can't just push out students who are challenging.

## FIRST FIND COMMON GROUND.

"You're right, kids and schools aren't businesses. But schools should be able to demonstrate results to parents and the community. We need information to know when something's working or not."

## THEN PIVOT TO A HIGHER EMOTION: WHAT'S BEST FOR MY KIDS.

"Parents have a right to know if their kids are getting the best education they can. It's what all parents want for their children."

## DOs ↑

**1** Do consider your audience. Most people want results and are comfortable with the concept of accountability. Common sense is on our side. It's teachers who are likely to be more challenged by treating schools like businesses.

**2** Do normalize the practice of measuring performance. Relate it to other organizations in your community.

"There's a measuring stick for everything. Every organization in your community has ways to measure progress and direction—the YMCA, the Girl Scouts, churches, local businesses, sports teams. They all want to know, 'How are we doing? Is what we're doing working?'"

**3** Do keep this about parents and kids.

"All parents want the best for their child. They deserve solid information that tells them whether or not their school is delivering what they say they are."

**4** Do stress the importance of reading and math.

"Schools are complicated, kids are complicated, but reading and math are basic. Reading and math are just too important to leave to subjectivity."

## DON'Ts ↓

Don't make this about teacher or school performance. But if you have to go there, be prepared. Know your state or district's evaluation formula. Then always bring the conversation back to the benefit for the student.

"It's true. The information is used for other things, too. It's one of the ways we measure how teachers and schools are doing. But just one. For example, in Minnesota, student test scores make up just 35% of a teacher's evaluation. The rest is based on classroom observation and student surveys. So it's just one of the tools we use. But first and foremost, the tests were created to help parents and teachers know if a student is reading and doing math at the level they should."



## WATCH OUT FOR RABBIT HOLES!

Recent examples of data causing things like cheating and school closings can easily hijack the conversation. Be prepared with other facts about the situation—how tests and information were part of the solution, not the problem.

## THE FACTS ARE ON YOUR SIDE

You just can't undervalue the importance of reading and math. A student not reading at his or her grade level by third grade is four times less likely to graduate high school on time—six times less likely for students from low-income families.

(Annie E. Casey Foundation)

A 2012 study revealed that reading and math ability at age 7 was linked to social class a full 35 years later. Participants who had higher reading and math skills as children ended up having higher incomes, better housing, and better jobs in adulthood.

(2012 University of Edinburgh Study published in Psychological Science)

## AUDIENCE SHIFTS

### BUSINESS

Most business people are comfortable with the idea of metrics and measurement, but don't assume all are. Take your cues from your audience.

### PARENTS

They want to know that schools are delivering results for their kids.

### TEACHERS

Don't assume all teachers are anti-accountability. Many are sympathetic to the message.



The argument:  
**IT'S JUST MORE  
TEACHING TO THE TEST**

What's at the heart of it? Parents want what's best for their kids, and some fear that testing doesn't provide any real value.

# FIRST

FIND  
COMMON  
GROUND.

"You're right. Teaching to the test is a waste of time. It's not at all helpful—for kids or for teachers."

# THEN

PIVOT TO  
A HIGHER  
EMOTION:  
WHAT'S  
BEST FOR  
MY KIDS.

"Parents want what's best for their kids, and a good test helps them get that. The new tests are an improvement, and finally provide parents with valuable information."

## DOs ↑

- 1 Do explain how the new tests are a solution to the problem.

"The new tests are better aligned with what kids are learning in the classroom. They're designed to measure if your child actually understands what she's been learning all year, not what she memorized last week."

"Because the new tests measure what kids are learning, preparing for these tests is actually time spent teaching. And good tests—just like good classroom and homework assignments—help students learn by asking them to apply their knowledge to new problems."

"Kids won't just fill in the blank, they'll have to demonstrate that they understand the material. So it's finally an accurate check on how kids are progressing. With the information these tests provide, parents can really know if their kids are where they should be, and if they're ready for the next grade."

- 2 Do talk about how a broader approach helps minimize teaching to the test.

"Teaching to the test is more likely to happen when tests are disconnected from what's actually being taught in the classroom."

"Teaching to the test happens when teachers haven't been provided with a teaching strategy that's aligned with new learning goals."

- 3 Do talk about other strategies in play that help teachers manage this change. Be prepared with specifics.

- 4 Do connect new tests to new standards.

"Today there's more agreement on what kids should master in each grade. And these tests measure what parents and teachers (and colleges and employers) say will be needed for future success, like writing and problem solving."

## DON'Ts ↓

- 1 It's okay to compare, but put the emphasis on how these tests are an improvement, not on how the old tests are bad. Nobody wants to feel like they've wasted time and money. And if you start bashing tests, your audience may not know which test you're bashing.

- 2 Don't overpromise. The new tests are an improvement, a step in the right direction. Don't sell them as a fix for everything.

## WHAT ABOUT EXTREME EXAMPLES?

"In my kid's school there's a class where all they do is work on test questions."

"Thankfully that's not happening in most schools. It's an extreme example and frankly it's just bad teaching. The new tests won't fix everything, and they can't make a bad teacher a good one, but they are a big improvement, and they've been designed so that 'teaching to the test' is next to impossible."



## WATCH OUT FOR RABBIT HOLES!

While it's true that some teachers do "phone it in" and take shortcuts, it's probably not productive to throw teachers under the bus.

## AUDIENCE SHIFTS

### TEACHERS

The new tests free teachers to do what they love: create a classroom environment that's about real learning, teaching kids how to get to the answer, not just memorize it.

### PARENTS

The new tests create less stress for kids because they're part of the natural flow of the learning process. There's no cramming, no test prep.

### BUSINESS

What gets measured gets done!



The argument:

# ONE SIZE DOESN'T FIT ALL

What's at the heart of it? Opponents say that one test can't possibly work for all kids, or capture regional and local nuances. They want parents to feel that their kids are too unique for testing.

# FIRST

FIND COMMON GROUND.

"I agree! All kids are unique. And every one of them, no matter how special they are, must must have reading, writing and math skills."

# THEN

PIVOT TO A HIGHER EMOTION: WHAT'S BEST FOR MY KIDS.

"Whatever your child wants to do later in life, and no matter how unique they may be, they've got to be solid in English and math. They're both essential to success in life. The new tests measure reading, writing and math skills only, nothing else, so you can know for sure how your kids are progressing in these critical areas."

## DOs ↑

**1** Do stress the critical nature of reading and math.

"There are many different kinds of dreams and aspirations, with one way to get there: reading and math."

"There isn't much you can do without reading and math. They're absolutely fundamental to everything. And in school, you can't learn science without math, and you can't learn history without reading. Without solid reading and math skills, you're stuck."

**2** Do stress that the new tests are for English language arts and math only.

**3** Do show how they work for all kids.

"These tests provide valuable, objective information for every kind of student. If your child is falling behind, the information will help the teacher provide more support. If your child is excelling, the information will help the teacher provide more challenge. They're designed to get your kids the help they need, or the advancement they've earned."

"It's not about standardization. Quite the opposite. It's about providing teachers with another tool, getting them the information they need so they can adapt their teaching and get your kids what they need to reach their full potential."

## WHAT ABOUT EXTREME EXAMPLES?

"Some kids are not good at testing."

"That's true. Testing is a skill, and just like any skill some are better at it than others. But just because you're not "good" at tests, doesn't mean you'll bomb it. And the results will still reveal a lot about a student's skill level."



## WATCH OUT FOR RABBIT HOLES!

Make sure you know exactly how your state is treating English Language Learners, gifted and talented students, and kids with special needs. Be ready with stories about kids who don't fit the norm.

## AUDIENCE SHIFTS

### BUSINESS

Talk about the difficulty of finding good candidates for specific jobs in specific industries, and the importance of basic skills like reading and math for every kind of job.

### TEACHERS

The information gives teachers another tool they can use to help their students. They get useful information they can act on.



The argument:  
**A DROP IN  
SCORES IS PROOF**

Opponents will use dropped scores as proof the tests are bad or too hard—it's the path of least resistance to blame the test. Parents might fear their kids aren't doing well, or as well as they thought they were.

# FIRST

FIND  
COMMON  
GROUND.

"It's true. Test scores did drop. But it's not cause for alarm when you really understand why scores dropped and what it means."

# THEN

PIVOT TO  
A HIGHER  
EMOTION:  
PEACE OF  
MIND.

"We expected scores to drop, and we know why they did. These new tests provide parents with a better measurement. They're a reset, a new baseline, not a drop. They make it possible for you to really know how your child is doing."

## DOs ↑

### 1 Do explain why scores have dropped.

"A lower score doesn't mean your school is doing worse or your kids are learning less. It simply means the tests changed. Now they're a better gauge of how your kids are doing in reading and math. This is a reset, not a failure. This is the first true baseline of your child's math and reading skills."

"We expected this drop in scores. Any time you change a test scores drop. We know that. Anything that's new has a learning curve."

### 2 Do talk about the benefit of improved tests.

"These are better tests. They actually measure real learning and understanding, not just memorization like the old tests. They provide parents and teachers with a much clearer picture of where students are, and what we need to do to move them forward. These are test worth taking."

### 3 Do connect tests to higher standards.

"The new tests are different because they line up with new higher standards. We've raised the bar. We want kids to be successful and prepared for what's ahead. It only makes sense that our tests should reflect these standards. And whenever you raise the bar it takes some time to catch up."

"Life today is more complex than when we were kids. What your children need to know and do is different from what we did. So we've raised the bar. These are 21st century standards and 21st century tests for 21st century kids."

### 4 Do talk about the resiliency of kids.

"Kids make lots of transitions—to the next grade, the next age group, the next team—and sometimes that means they're no longer 'the best' or #1. Having setbacks is part of how kids grow. These new tests may be more challenging at first, but kids will catch up. They always rise to the level of the kids around them, and to the expectations we set."

## DON'Ts ↓

### 1 Don't overly rely on messages about the economy, jobs, and college readiness, especially when talking to parents who have very young kids.

"For your kids to succeed in this economy they have to meet higher learning standards. We need to start preparing kids for college and career in kindergarten."

### 2 Don't generalize. Get specific about what's going on in your state. Know the details.

### 3 Don't make it sound like you've changed tests for change sake. The tests have been improved, and for good reason.

"We changed the test to reflect higher learning goals for kids—what kids need to know to be successful today."

### 4 Don't make it sound like the tests are an intellectual workout, just to make it harder for kids.

## HAUNTED BY THE PAST?

Were there any recent examples of dropped scores (like a change in the cut score) in your community that had negative consequences? Be ready to acknowledge them, and separate what's happening now from recent history.

## AUDIENCE SHIFTS

### BUSINESS

It's okay to connect new standards and tests to jobs and the economy.

### TEACHERS

Respect that change means more work for teachers. Acknowledge that they need help and resources from their district.



### WATCH OUT FOR RABBIT HOLES

Know how the new tests in your state compare to the old ones. Do they take more time to administer or less? How much did they cost? What are the consequences for a drop in scores? If you get pulled into the weeds, be prepared. Tell the best story you can about your state.



The argument:  
**TESTING IS BAD.  
PERIOD.**

What's at the heart of it? Some people don't like being graded or labeled or typed, and they don't want it for their kids.

# FIRST

FIND  
COMMON  
GROUND.

"You're right. Tests aren't fun. They're not supposed to be. There's always some discomfort with evaluation—it's part of life."

# THEN

PIVOT TO  
A HIGHER  
EMOTION:  
COMMON  
SENSE AND  
PEACE OF  
MIND.

"Tests are part of life, from childhood through adulthood. They let us know we're ready to move on. They reassure parents that their kids have mastered the skills they need to reach the next level. And they help schools know what kids need."

## DOs ↑

- 1 Do not normalize testing. Remind people how some form of testing adds value to their life.

"These tests are just like an annual checkup—an important opportunity to find out how your child is doing, and how they compare to other kids their age. Just like height and weight are benchmarks, these tests are benchmarks for reading and math."

"Throughout childhood you must be able to pass certain levels, show some mastery, before you can move on. From video games to swimming lessons to driving tests to tryouts, kids have lots of moments when they have to prove themselves."

- 2 Do find positive sound bites, especially from students.

- 3 Do talk about how these tests are different.

"The new tests have broader ways to recognize talent and skill. They measure creativity and critical thinking, not just memorization."

- 4 Do sell the power of information.

"Teachers will change from year to year. But the information from these tests will provide the constant, objective benchmark you can track over the course of your child's education."

"These tests provide valuable, objective information for every kind of student. If your child is falling behind, the information will help the teacher provide more support. If your child is excelling, the information will help the teacher provide more challenge. They're designed to get your kids the help they need, or the advancement they've earned."

## DON'Ts ↓

- 1 Don't sell the experience of testing, sell the value of information. Sell the results.

"Growing requires discomfort. Learning includes challenges. The process isn't fun for anyone, but the information is really important."

- 2 Don't compare it too a flu shot, that's negative. Stick with annual checkup.

## DID YOU KNOW?

Testing can find kids who are really smart but don't show it in the classroom, or identify kids who are really good at school but bad at tests.



## WATCH OUT FOR RABBIT HOLES!

Make sure you know the technical implementation in your state. There might still be some "bubble testing."

## AUDIENCE SHIFTS

### BUSINESS

Some business people will relate to the idea of certification exams.

### TEACHERS

Tests provide valuable, objective information for a teaching practice. They're another tool teachers can use to help kids.