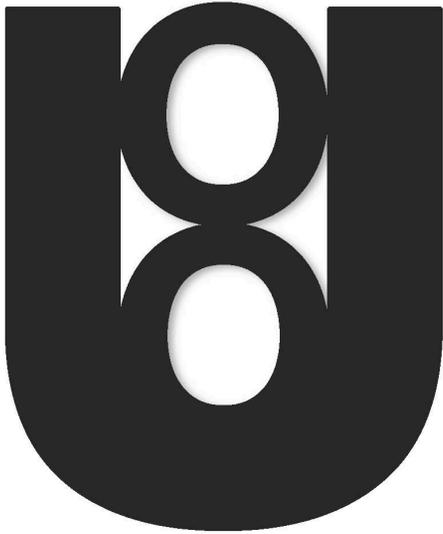


# **A Guide for Parents: Advocating for Your Child in the Early Years**

**By UOO in partnership with Nancy Carlsson-Paige and the DEY Project (Defending the Early Years)**





**Testing in the early years contributes to behavior problems, retention and failure.**

For more than a decade, federal education policies have expanded testing within our public schools, including in many preschools. Extensive testing is not appropriate for young children.

Young children need to spend their time actively engaging in play and learning through direct experiences with materials, activities, peers and teachers. Rather than measuring school success by testing, the most reliable approach to assessing young children's learning is through ongoing observations by skilled teachers and assessments of children's work over time.

The Common Core State Standards, adopted by most states, require that children learn discrete skills and facts by certain ages. The standards were not written by early childhood educators, have not been field tested or researched, and are being implemented without parental permission.

The standards for kindergarten require the mastery of more than 90 skills within literacy and math. This emphasis on all children learning the same narrow skills and facts leads to more direct teaching, less active learning, less individualization, and increased testing to determine mastery of the required skills. It has resulted in a greater focus on early academics - even in preschool - and less active learning and play. The testing necessary to

determine mastery of these skills is time consuming and stressful to both children and teachers.

Young children have difficulty completing standardized tests because they are unable to sit and concentrate for long periods of time, making the test results inaccurate. Many educators oppose these tests, but are unable to speak out for fear of retribution. Testing in the early years contributes to behavior problems, retention and failure. (See Alliance for Childhood: Tips on Testing link below for more information.)

Children should have rich learning experiences in preschool and kindergarten that allow for indoor and outdoor play and hands-on experiences. They also need opportunities to develop their creativity, their capacity for problem solving and their love for learning. Children should not be subjected to long hours of drilling to learn skills, direct instruction, or on-going testing.

## What can parents do?

**1. Find out what tests your child will be required to take at school:** It is doubtful that you will be informed of all of the tests your child will be given, so it will be necessary to ask. Once you have the list of tests/assessments, consult our website ([www.unitedoptout.com](http://www.unitedoptout.com)). Go to your state's page. See if there is information for determining which tests on your list, if any, are necessary and developmentally appropriate. This will help you determine if there are any tests you want to refuse. All parents have the right to refuse a test for their children.

**2. Ask about recess at your child's school:** Regular outdoor play is essential for young children's healthy development. Many elementary schools, even kindergartens, have decreased or eliminated recess. Tell your school that you want recess for your child and all children.

**3. Ask to visit your child's classroom and inquire about the daily schedule:** Young children need play-based learning, social interaction, and lots of active exploration of materials. They need opportunities to explore with blocks and building materials, puppets and imaginative play, and art materials of all kinds. Ask how much time your child spends seated and how much time is spent moving independently within the classroom. How much time is spent using paper and pencil and how much with concrete, hands-on materials? Ask if your child can choose from interest areas and for how much of the day. Ask if your child has ongoing access to art, music, and PE.

**4. Inquire into your school's homework policy:** It is better for preschool and kindergarten children not to have actual homework. Some teachers ask parents to read to children at home or to engage in certain at-home activities. But some schools require children to complete weekly packets of worksheets and to work on formal reading and writing skills at home. These are inappropriate outside-of-school activities for young children. Tell the school you don't want your child to have skills-based, written homework.

**5. Inquire into your school's data-collection policies:** Find out if your school is gathering data on your child, and if so, what data and why? There is extensive data collection occurring across the country, made easier after the US Department of Education child privacy laws were changed in 2011 to make it easier to share your child's school data with outside corporations. There is much concern as to why this data is being gathered and how it is used. And there are now grave concerns about the security of this data as it is stored online and becomes available to for-profit corporations. inBloom is one such entity that is putting data in a "cloud" online, available to be accessed by for-profit corporations. Tell the school you want to keep your child's personal data private and never shared with an outside entity without your express permission.

**6. Ask about the discipline policies used at your child's school and classroom:** In recent years, punitive discipline systems have become increasingly common in our public schools. Such systems often use rewards and punishments, denial of recess, threats, isolation or silencing techniques to maintain control over children. They can be harmful to children and undermine their overall sense of security, confidence and emotional wellbeing. Often parents don't know that such programs exist. Visit a school before enrolling to make sure humane approaches are being used to support children's behavior.

**7. Ask how your child's data is displayed within the school and classroom:** Often schools have a data room or data wall where children's test scores are displayed for all to see. This public ranking of children's test scores undermines their security and fosters competition and fear in school. If you detect that there is any public display of your child's test scores, ask that her or his name be removed.



# DEY

**Defending the Early Years**

## Resources:

If you are not satisfied with the answers you are given to questions you ask at your child's school, you can take several steps.

**First**, try to find other parents of children in the school who feel similarly and begin to organize among yourselves.

**Second**, if you have a local school board, find out if its members can help bring in the positive changes parents want.

**Third**, find the national organizations that are working against over-testing and harmful education policies to help you in your efforts.

## Here is a list of these:

**United Opt Out**  
www.unitedoptout.com

**Defending the Early Years**  
<http://deyproject.org/>

**Alliance for Childhood**  
allianceforchildhood.org

**Class Size Matters**  
classsizematters.org

**The National Center for Fair & Open Testing**  
www.fairtest.org

**Parents Across America**  
www.parentsacrossamerica.org

## Additional reading:

<http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/standards>

[http://www.edweek.org/media/joint\\_statement\\_on\\_core\\_standards.pdf](http://www.edweek.org/media/joint_statement_on_core_standards.pdf)

[http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/sites/allianceforchildhood.org/files/file/tips\\_on\\_testing.pdf](http://www.allianceforchildhood.org/sites/allianceforchildhood.org/files/file/tips_on_testing.pdf)



We opt out of high stakes testing and resist all market-based reforms seeking to privatize and destroy public education.

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