

Standardized Test FAQ's

Why are standardized Tests used?

Milpitas Christian School has chosen the TerraNova 3rd edition (TN3) because it represents a much larger student population than the state tests. It is also constant in a changing statewide testing system. The TN3 is a reliable measure of performance and is commonly used by Christian schools, private schools as well as public schools across the nation, giving a better-balanced measure. Most ACSI schools use TN3, enabling us to compare our scores directly to the ACSI norms as well as the National norms.

What do standardized tests such as Terra Nova measure?

Standardized tests measure students' performance on a broad spectrum of general knowledge that students of a certain age/grade level should be expected to have. TN3 has provided limited standards for each subject and grade level. Several of these standards measure progress for our established curriculum standards. Standardized tests, however are not a direct measure of what we teach. Teacher-driven assessments offer the best indication of a student's accomplishments in our particular curriculum.

What do standardized tests fail to measure?

TN3 and other standardized tests do not measure the actual writing skills of the students. There are language arts components, but no paragraph or essay writing subtests. No accurate measure of achievement is included for students who learn and demonstrate learning in ways other than paper/pencil tests. Many students excel at other performance assessments and know all of the material very well. All standardized tests also fail to measure other key components of school success such as ability to work with others, staying on task, contributing to the educational environment of the classroom, and organizational skills. No oral presentation skills are measured. Many students demonstrate learning orally.

How are these scores used at MCS?

Teachers and administrators use standardized test scores as a general indicator of our effectiveness in delivering a high quality academic program. We look for trends over several years across all of the tested areas. We analyze the data as one part of a much larger picture of excellence in education and use all of the pieces of this picture to maintain our accreditation. Parents may use the scores to determine if the child made a year's worth of progress when compared with the last year's results. They may also compare their child's scores with the national average, which, of course, is the 50th percentile.

Why can't the results be compared to California State Assessments?

We do not have access to the ever-changing standardized assessments used in California public school, nor do we wish to administer such tests. California is considered by many to be one of the lowest states in the country in terms of public education. We prefer to compare to a much wider group that includes high achieving states as well.

Which scores give the best indicator of my child's achievement on the TN3?

At MCS, we like to use the national percentile scores, and sometimes the ACSI scores. National percentile scores tell us how our students compare to the average scores of the children in the nationwide norming group. The ACSI scores tell us something about how our students perform as compared with other schools that belong to the Association of Christian Schools International. The ACSI group includes private, Christian schools all over the world.

What is preventing MCS from scoring in the 90th percentile or above in all subjects?

At MCS we value students as created in God’s image with diverse needs and abilities. We accept a range of students, and include all of them in the testing process. An exclusive school, designed only for academically gifted students would fail to enrich the lives of the students by involving them in a program that celebrated the many different types of gifts that God has given the unique individuals that make up each classroom at MCS. Our scores are high because we have a challenging curriculum, taught by teachers who are passionate about student learning, but they are not all in the nineties because we seek to minister to many families with students of many different abilities.

Are MCS students working at or above grade level?

One report that we receive with the test scores, indicates that very few students are performing below their grade level, some are marginal at grade level, and nearly all are very successful or exceeding grade level expectations. Most of those who are performing below grade level are receiving help from the Learning Lab department in order to ensure that they are making progress in learning the key concepts they need each year.

Why don’t kindergarten and first grade students take the test?

Young students suffer a great deal of stress during this type of testing process. The results are not very helpful in diagnosing student learning because the developmental level of the students precludes including a high number of items in each category. Therefore, one mistake, or correct guess, can skew the results dramatically. Based on what we believed to be trustworthy research on the stress level of the students compared to the usefulness of the results, MCS decided many years ago that standardized testing for the youngest students was not in their best interest.

How might parents use the standardized test results?

The results from these tests are only one of several ways that parents should assess academic progress. Reports cards, daily assignments, classroom participation, parent-teacher conferences and other assessments must be considered along with any standardized test. Some children see test-taking as a very stressful situation or have been ill, and so the results may be a poor reflection of a child’s true academic performance. As always, parents are welcome to schedule an appointment with a teacher or administrator to review their child’s standardized test results.

How does the MCS use Terra Nova results?

The individual student and class results are given to each teacher. Grade-level and school-wide results are only one of many ways to evaluate the overall academic program. As a school, we interpret the results in the context of our SLO’s (Schoolwide Learning Objectives). The most relevant SLO’s are “becoming complex thinkers” and “becoming effective communicators”. Using this standards-based approach, we use the results to determine how effectively the curriculum is working to achieve the standards we have set for our students.

What scores are the most important?

It is best to use the Percentile scores. A percentile score of 75 would indicate that a student is achieving better than 75 percent of other students at the same grade level. The national percentile is based on all students, therefore, 50 percent is the norm. Comparison with ACSI is usually tougher because the norm in private Christian schools is higher than 50 percent.

But you didn’t answer MY question.

Call or e-mail Ms. Robyn Ritsema the School Principal. The school phone numbers and e-mail addresses can be accessed on the website.

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We are proud of our standardized test scores, but we will not overemphasize them. Please join us in praying for the overall development of our students, for that is our mission and purpose. Read your child's test scores in the spirit of celebrating excellence in this one area of child development, and the overall education program of MCS.