

Part 2: Why do educators feel that test-preparation activities are necessary and/or important?

To help answer this question, intensive phone interviews were conducted with over 90 Iowa teachers during the spring of 2006. Based on these interviews, it's clear that the vast majority of teachers believe that at least some type of test preparation is necessary in order for test scores to be a true reflection of student learning.

Furthermore, the justifications provided by teachers for using particular types of test-preparation activities were nearly always based on good intentions, as can be seen by the sample of justifications provided below.

"I want to make sure that my students

... do really well on the test(s) and score as high as they can."

... know how to answer multiple-choice questions."

... remember what I taught them earlier in the year."

... have had the opportunity to learn the content and skills covered by the test."

... have the same advantages as those students in Mr. Whosit's class."

... feel comfortable and not anxious when taking the test."

... feel good about themselves and their performance on the test."

... can understand what the questions are about, especially special education students and ELLs."

... are familiar with the terminology or vocabulary used on the test."

... are testwise and know the "tricks" when taking a multiple-choice test."

... receive scores that represent their true knowledge and not just their ability to read the question."

But, are good intentions enough to justify the use of a particular activity?

Of course not. As educators (and possibly as parents), many of us have first-hand experience with considering the consequences of the actions of children, as well as the actions of others, and are fully aware that having good intentions is rarely sufficient to justify an action.

To clarify this point in the context of test preparation, consider the types of actions that might occur in response to an educator’s “good intentions,” as illustrated in the table below. What if the good intention listed on the left leads to the action listed on the right?

Good Intention	Action
... do really well on the test(s) and score as high as they can	→ giving students more time to take the test than what is stated in the <i>Directions</i>
... know how to answer multiple-choice questions	→ using multiple-choice questions almost exclusively on classroom assessments
... remember what I taught them earlier in the year	→ spending two weeks right before the test reviewing and practicing content known to be on the test
... have had the opportunity to learn the content and skills covered by the test	→ conducting a mini lesson right before the test to cover a particular content area on the test that’s taught later in the year
... have the same advantages as those students in Mr. Whosit’s class”	→ using the <u>same</u> materials as those used by Mr. Whosit to “prepare” students
... feel comfortable and not anxious when taking the test	→ using commercially-prepared practice tests the week before the test is administered
... can understand what the questions are about, especially special education students and ELLs	→ reviewing the test questions in advance with these students to help them understand what the questions are asking
... are familiar with the terminology or vocabulary used on the test	→ using last year’s test to practice with the students
... are testwise and know the “tricks” when taking a multiple-choice test	→ teaching test-taking skills for two days right before the test
... receive scores that represent their true knowledge and not just their ability to read the question	→ reading out loud the questions on the <i>Reading Comprehension</i> test

The negative consequences associated with implementing some of these actions are probably more obvious for some actions than for others. By the time you have completed this lesson, you should be able to not only identify the negative consequences associated with each of these actions, but also be able to describe a more appropriate action that could have been taken, if possible, in order to achieve the same goal. During the closing activity you will be asked to summarize your thoughts and ideas corresponding to these actions.

Time for reflection and/or interaction:

What types of things do you do (or use) with students, right before testing or throughout the year, to help prepare them for the Iowa Tests?

Why do you use each of these activities?