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–To Test, Or Not To Test –

A friend recently asked if she should request updated academic testing from the school district for her son who receives special education services. My response? Parents need to weigh the impact of testing on their child. Additional testing may give teachers and parents new information about how the child learns and the most effective instructional strategies to use.

But on the other side, will it give a true picture of the student as a learner? For example, some children are just not good "test-takers," for whatever reason. In addition, the person giving the test might be a stranger to the child. Unfortunately, test scores are often seen as the ultimate truth, and may live on in school records for many years. If the test results show the student has many needs, educators may use them as justification for more "pull-out" from general education classes or as a reason to prevent placement in general education classes altogether. The impact on the student can be devastating.

There is an alternative to formal testing. Parents may not realize how much they know about their child's learning strengths, how they learn best, and what works and doesn't work when teaching the child new skills. Family knowledge, coupled with teachers' observations and data collection, can yield a better, more accurate picture of the "whole child," and provide valuable information about how the child will learn best in a general education classroom.

But will *any* information from a formal assessment or parent/educator knowledge make a difference in how teachers work with the student? If educators don't use such information to help the child identify and capitalize on his/her strengths, to teach the child in ways he/she learns best, and provide multiple ways for the child to demonstrate what he/she knows and can do, then even the "best" assessments are of no value. Let us commit to using only valid and reliable measures of a child's current performance level, and use the information to make a difference for each and every student!

Identify your vision: **What are the outcomes you want from a student being evaluated?**

Use your voice: **Ask how the test results or observation information will inform the teachers' instruction.**

Work together: **Families and educators can jointly decide on appropriate ways to measure where students are and the progress they are making.**

Previous newsletter are available at <http://www.visionsandvoicestogether.com>. Please let me know if you're interested in one of my presentations and/or customized consulting and coaching.

What we anticipate, determines what we find!

Charmaine Thaner