



Test-Preparation Toolkit



Equip Your Students for Success

High-stakes testing can be intimidating for students and educators alike. However, with some thoughtful planning and the right tools, you can ease the tension. We've put together this toolkit with resources and strategies to help you offer your students the rigorous, engaging, and individualized test preparation they need for success!



10 Tips to Improve Test Scores

The right preparation strategies can go a long way toward relieving the anxiety of the testing season and improving student outcomes. Follow these 10 simple tips to see improvement in your classroom, school, or district test scores!

1. Make sure that your students are prepared for next-generation assessments

The days of the basic #2 pencil test have come and gone. In addition to preparing your students for the more rigorous content that next-generation assessments will test, you must be sure that they are prepared for the online format of the test. Make sure that they are familiar with the kinds of devices that assessments will be administered through, that they know how to navigate the test forms, and that they have been exposed to technology-enhanced (TE) item types. Dedicate class time to preparing students for the technical aspects of next-generation assessments so that on test day, they can effectively demonstrate their content knowledge.

2. Benchmark your learners

Before you get started preparing students for their assessments, it's very important to know where they are compared to the standards they will be assessed against. A benchmark assessment can help teachers and administrators identify which learners have stayed on track, which ones have gotten ahead, and which ones have some knowledge gaps. Use this information to help determine instructional tactics and to develop a plan for conducting effective review sessions that will target the skills and concepts your students need to work on.

3. Practice, practice, practice!

The cliché is true: practice does make perfect. Create a review plan that provides multiple chances for students to practice not only the content they will need to know but also the testing format. Practice tests can help ensure that students are making progress, familiarize them with the testing format, and help guide classroom instruction to ensure that teachers are concentrating on the areas of highest need. Make sure that your plan includes modalities beyond taking practice tests—games, writing, and speech exercises can help students retain information and gain a deeper understanding of concepts. The more exposure that students have to the material and testing environment, the more comfortable they will be when testing day arrives.



4. Leverage your data

Most likely, you have access to a lot of data on your students, whether it is results from previous high-stakes exams or data collected in the classroom. Make use of this data to guide instruction and track students' progress during review. It can also help you identify which concepts and skills students are struggling with and where individualized attention is needed.

5. Provide incentives

A reward system can take some of the anxiety out of test preparation, add a little fun to your review efforts, and create a healthy dose of competition to keep your students motivated. Set specific goals for students to meet, and give them something to look forward to when they meet them—be it a treat, game time, or something as elaborate as a pep rally. Find out what would get your students excited, and start planning!

6. Get parental buy-in

It's no secret that parental involvement plays a huge role in students' academic success, and this can certainly extend to success on assessments. Parents can be strong motivators for your learners, and having their buy-in can dramatically increase testing success. Set up standard communication points to ensure that parents are regularly informed and involved in their child's education and upcoming assessments. Technology can make communication with parents easier than ever! Involve parents in your classroom test-preparation activities by communicating with them on a regular basis about what you (and their child) are doing to get ready. This gives parents the opportunity to engage with their children about what is happening in class and to convey ways in which they can help their child at home.

7. Create a culture of positivity

As Henry Ford is credited for saying, "Whether you think you can or think you can't—you're right." It is critical to create a culture of positivity throughout schools and districts all year, but it's especially important before high-stakes exams. Students often experience a lot of nervousness before exams, so make sure that you and other educators are their cheerleaders by exuding positivity that will ripple down to the students.

Get students thinking about what will happen when they meet their testing goals instead of getting caught up in the anxiety of testing season. Perhaps squeeze in a quick writing assignment asking students to picture themselves graduating, going to college, or having a cool job in the future. The mind is a powerful weapon, and it has a unique gift for making things happen that don't seem possible.

8. Add "catering manager" to your resume

A lot of research has been done on the effects of nutrition (more specifically, a lack of it) and test performance. Make sure that students are well fed at the start of every testing day. Encourage them to eat a good breakfast at home (tell their parents too!), and stock up on granola bars or other small, wholesome snacks as a backup plan.

9. Embrace the power of previewing

Your students are probably familiar with the strategy of previewing text before diving in, and it can be a very helpful tactic for testing. Encourage your students to preview test sections before answering questions to help pace themselves and give their brains time to absorb the information. It is also an important strategy for students to be successful on the new TE item types, which come with their own sets of directions.

10. Keep students moving

We all know that exercise is a great stress reliever. Incorporate regular movement into review sessions to improve students' retention. On testing day, give students the chance to move around before the test begins to help alleviate the pressure. Effective seated stretching can also improve student focus; look into different techniques and share them with your students to use during testing.

Four Steps to Design Your Own Test-Preparation Boot Camp

For millions of American students and educators, testing season can be a challenge, and with new state assessments, technology-enhanced item types, and more rigorous content, that challenge is even greater.

It's not surprising that teachers and principals wonder how best to use the time leading up to tests effectively. Let's acknowledge that an entire year's worth of content cannot be taught in six to eight weeks. Solid instruction takes planning and time for students to process and absorb the information. However, with a focused approach, the weeks leading up to your state test can be easily structured to maximize preparation efforts. Here are four steps for implementing a successful Test Prep Boot Camp.

1. What to review? Set priorities.

There are dozens of concepts and skills in the eligible content as defined by national and state standards. We also know that all standards are not equal. Most grade levels will concentrate on a specific category or skill, setting the stage for learning new material in subsequent years. So, it makes sense for the review to focus on skills that fall into the primary category of subject matter that the majority of test questions will be built around.

Once you have prioritized which material to review, use reliable data sources to determine what specific skills need attention in the classroom. It is also helpful to view multiple levels of data to look for patterns within the district, grade, and class, as well as among individual students and groups of students. Administrators can see trends across the district or within a school. Teachers will be able to set priorities with their class(es) or for individual students.

Be sure to narrow your list to one skill/concept per week, per subject. It's more important to review information at a manageable pace than to overwhelm students by trying to cover everything at once.

2. How to structure reviewing? Create a plan.

First, create an instructional plan to fill knowledge gaps and review grade-level content. You may have to give a diagnostic quiz to clarify what is causing the lack of understanding. Is the low performance due to complete confusion regarding the material or merely not knowing the vocabulary? Once you determine the situation, review the material. Practice will not be constructive unless students understand the content.

Next, provide multiple chances for practice. All practice should emulate the state test. This means giving your students frequent opportunities to get comfortable with the testing environment they will experience. If they will take the test online, then practice should be digital so that students develop the keyboarding skills they will use. Many state tests make use of new technology-enhanced item types that better assess the depth of students' knowledge than traditional multiple-choice questions. Make sure that your students are familiar with these item types and model good test-taking habits while practicing them. New question types come with their own set of directions. Now, more than ever, students need to read the whole question, the entire passage, and all of the answer choices to know what is expected of them.

3. Are students improving? Track progress.

You will want to track student progress to validate the effectiveness of review and practice. Leverage your data from online test-preparation and formative-assessment programs to understand how students are progressing. Taking the time to reflect from week to week and make note of what worked and what didn't may help you refine your approach for the following weeks and build the foundation for an even stronger test-preparation program next year.

4. What will motivate students? Provide incentives.

A reward system can be a great strategy to demonstrate to students the importance of review in the weeks leading up to testing, and it can motivate them to work hard. Base your system upon some level of improvement, set specific goals for students to meet, and acknowledge success frequently. Make parents aware of your review strategy and reward system, and let them know when their child reaches a goal. The more positive reinforcement each student receives, the better. Furthermore, a dose of healthy competition, some classroom fun, and a pizza party (or any other kind of class celebration) are always effective incentives.



[4 Testing Tips] Special Populations Preparation

Testing season is stressful for everyone, but it can be especially trying for special populations and their educators. These four tips will help you prepare for a smooth and successful testing season with your special population students.

1. Understand the available test accommodations

A variety of accommodations is available to special population students, depending on the type of test and educational policy local to your school. Utilize resources within your school, district, and state department of education to determine exactly what kind of accommodations your special population students can qualify for. Make sure that your students have been granted all of the options available to them. Knowing the accommodations that apply to your learners will also help you simulate the actual environment that they will be tested in when practicing.

2. Leverage the data

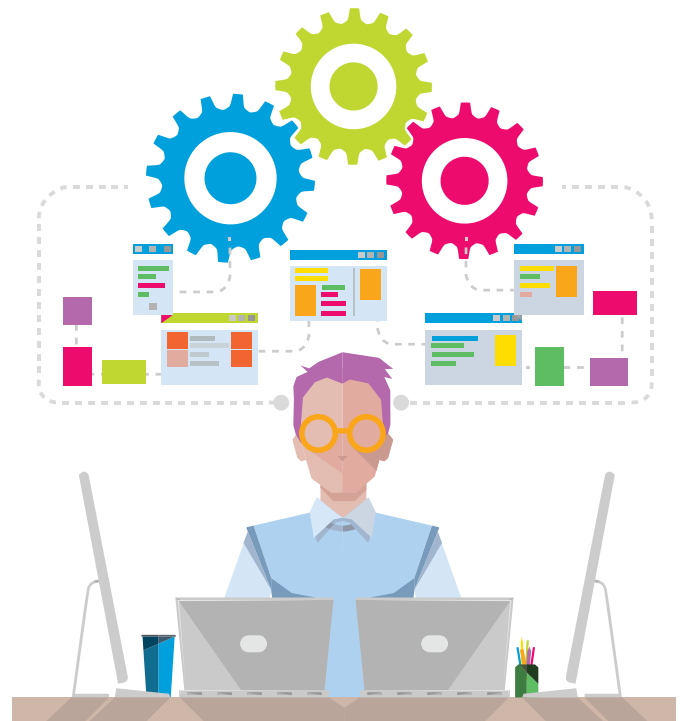
You have access to a lot of data on your students, including results from previous high-stakes exams and data collected in the classroom. This data can be your best tool to differentiate instruction and determine how to prepare your students for testing. Make use of formative assessment strategies to identify which concepts and skills students are struggling with and where individualized attention is needed.

3. Prepare students for the testing environment

Let your students know what to expect from the tests and the setting in which they will be administered. It's important that your learners practice in an environment that mirrors the actual test environment they will experience, including your state's accommodations for special populations. If their official test will be conducted online, make sure that they have been exposed to online tests. If technology-enhanced item types will be used, make sure that your students have practiced answering these item types. Preparing for the experience of test-taking will reduce anxiety and have a huge impact on your students' test scores.

4. Utilize available funding

Significant amounts of funding are available to support education for special populations. Spend some time researching online and talking to your school or district administrators—there may be grants or other funding sources that your program could take advantage of to obtain important resources like edtech tools or expand your staff. Some schools and teachers are even having success using crowdfunding techniques to meet their classroom needs. Regardless of the method you choose, taking full advantage of the funding options available will help provide your students with the educational resources needed to be successful during testing season.



4 Tips to Prepare Students for Next-Generation Assessments

Educators have been working hard to prepare students for the rigorous content of state-specific next-generation assessments; however, there is an additional set of challenges that students need to be prepared for—the technical aspects of online assessments. In order to effectively demonstrate content knowledge on next-generation assessments, students need experience with the digital environment of their online test. This means having familiarity with the computer, tablet, or other device used to take the test; competency navigating the test; exposure to all new item types; and possession of the basic keyboarding skills needed.

1. Device familiarity

Yes, it is true that most children today have some degree of experience with technology and are often very quick to learn new technology. However, there is a time and place for everything, and testing day is not the time to expect students to learn a new technology. Instead, students should come into their state assessments with a high level of comfort with the technology being used so that they can focus on demonstrating their content knowledge.

Providing students with exposure to the appropriate technologies should be an important part of all educators' test-preparation efforts. Many test providers offer detailed technical information on device, operating system, and browser compatibility of their assessments to help educators use the correct tools when preparing their students.

2. Navigating the tests

It is also important for students to understand and feel comfortable with the navigation of their online tests. Comfort with the format and functionality of the online testing environment will help prevent students from getting lost, wasting time, and becoming frustrated. Some aspects of the online tests that students need to become familiar with include:

- Moving from one test question to the next
- Scrolling to see and interact with all parts of a test question
- Scrolling text passages separately from the items associated with the passage
- Pausing and saving during a test session
- Restarting an in-progress test
- Navigating test sections or units
- Reviewing answers before completing the test

Assessment providers such as PARCC and Smarter Balanced provide training tests as a resource to help teachers and students become familiar with navigating their online tests. Search online or speak with your district administrators to see if your test provider offers this.

3. Exposure to new item types

For decades, most tests—especially end-of-year state assessments—have been comprised almost exclusively of multiple-choice questions. This means that students are extremely familiar with the multiple-choice format and come into testing expecting that each question will have a single correct answer and several incorrect options. The next-generation assessments, however, make use of new technology-enhanced (TE) question types, and this set of



expectations can cause test-taking behaviors that can be counterproductive. For example, students accustomed to answering multiple-choice items may not read the directions carefully for each question. When these students come across a multiple response question with several correct answers, they could easily identify only the first correct answer and then move on to the next question.

Ensuring that students are familiar with the new TE item types is crucial to ensuring that testing will be an accurate measure of their content knowledge. Some of these new item types can be categorized as follows:

Multiple Response	Students can select more than one correct answer in a multiple-choice format
Cloze	Students select a response from a drop-down menu in an equation or sentence
Sequence	Students click an image and move it to the correct location on the screen to arrange a sequence and create the correct overall answer
Matched Pairs	Students move answers from one area on the screen to another and create matching pairs
Hot Text	Text choices are identified for students within an item, and students select the correct text answer(s) with the cursor
Hot Spot	Using the cursor, students identify a location in an image that represents the correct answer
Fill in the Blank	Students enter an alphanumeric response in an open box in an item (an item may have more than one open box)
Graphical Gap Match	Using the cursor, students drag one image to another to answer the question
Multiple Choice	Students choose the single best answer

4. Basic Keyboarding Skills

Because next-generation assessments include critical-writing components such as constructed response, performance tasks, and fill-in-the-blank items, students need to have enough familiarity with the keyboard and number pad to successfully answer these question types. They don't need to be expert touch typists, but they do need to be comfortable with basic keyboarding. Below are a few free resources to help introduce students to a keypad and build keyboarding skills:

- ABCya! Keyboard Challenge: www.abcya.com/keyboard.htm
- BBC Schools - Dance Mat Typing: www.bbc.co.uk/schools/typing/
- Typing.com: www.typing.com/
- Sense-lang How to Type: www.sense-lang.org/



High-Stakes Test-Taking Checklist

So, the big day has arrived—it's time for your students to take their tests. While content knowledge is important, test taking is a skill in and of itself, and having an understanding of good test-taking practices can improve scores dramatically. Use this checklist to remind your learners of 10 important strategies that can help them be successful when taking their tests. And don't forget the most important tip—stay positive!

- ☑ Read all test directions and titles
- ☑ Always read the entire question
- ☑ Determine what the question is asking
- ☑ Reread the question if you need to
- ☑ Identify key "clue" words in the question (Watch out for the word "not"!)
- ☑ Select a strategy to solve or answer the question
- ☑ Think through your solution
- ☑ Eliminate choices you know are incorrect
- ☑ Select the best answer
- ☑ Go back and check your work

Above all, relax and do your best—you can do it!



Dawn Brookhart,
Director of Curriculum
and Instruction



2,500 students
210 teachers



91% Caucasian
35% economically
disadvantaged



Study Island
Reading Eggs

Danville Area School District in Pennsylvania's rural Susquehanna Valley region serves approximately 2,500 students with diverse academic needs. The district's strategic plan called for a broader use of technology to individualize instruction and monitor student progress. Since implementing Study Island in 2009, the district's test performance has steadily increased, and for the past two years, its proficiency rate on the Keystone Exams has been the highest in the region.

Success Story: Danville Area School District — Danville, Pennsylvania

Success for All Students, at Every Level

The Challenge

The Danville Area School District is located in the scenic Susquehanna Valley of Pennsylvania, and is the sole school district in Montour County. Approximately 2,500 students are served by an experienced and qualified staff of over 210 teachers and 17 administrators. The district's strategic plan emphasizes how technology can facilitate more effective learning by engaging students in the content and empowering them with more responsibility for their academic careers. Part of the district's challenge, however, is implementing this strategic plan across its academically diverse student population, at all levels, while simultaneously and accurately monitoring student progress.

How They Did It

In 2009, Danville Area School District (DASD) implemented Study Island as its technology solution for students in grades 3–12. Study Island has had a profound impact across the district's student population. It has implemented the program as an enrichment tool for advanced learners, a remediation tool for struggling learners, a grade-level benchmark solution, and a progress-monitoring tool for individualized education programs (IEPs). The program has helped DASD become a district where instruction is truly data driven.

Study Island's benchmark assessments are used with students beginning in the third grade, and the results of those benchmarks are used to target instruction and provide remediation and enrichment where needed. As Dawn Brookhart, the district's director of curriculum and instruction put it, "Study Island enables us to administer meaningful benchmark assessments. More important, it provides a prescriptive solution that addresses individual student needs."

Study Island serves as an effective progress-monitoring tool for DASD's special education teachers. "This has been a critical component in our ability to close the achievement gap," Brookhart said. The district uses the program to benchmark IEP students against grade-level standards and provide remediation content as needed. Study Island also helps DASD serve the needs of its advanced students by providing material that is above grade level, keeping accelerated students engaged. Advanced Placement® teachers at the district's high school leverage the program and frequently make use of Study Island materials as "bell-ringer" activities at the start of class.

Success

In 2013-14, DASD students achieved 80 percent proficiency on the literature Keystone Exams, by far the highest in central Pennsylvania. Algebra I Keystone scores have also reflected high achievement, with 73 percent proficiency in 2014 and 79 percent in 2013. Prior to the implementation of the Keystone Exams in 2013, the district's Pennsylvania System of School Assessment (PSSA) scores for grades 11 and 12 also increased steadily since it began using Study Island. In 2008, before adoption of Study Island, the district's PSSA scores in reading were at a 78.7 percent proficiency rate, and math scores stood at 60.6 percent proficiency. By 2012, reading proficiency increased to 87.6 percent and math proficiency increased to 85.6 percent.



Study Island enables us to administer meaningful benchmark assessments. More important, it provides a prescriptive solution that addresses individual student needs.



Dawn Brookhart,
Director of Curriculum
and Instruction



Study Island played a key role in the transformation of our schools by providing our teachers with the tools necessary to assess, remediate, and enrich all learners.



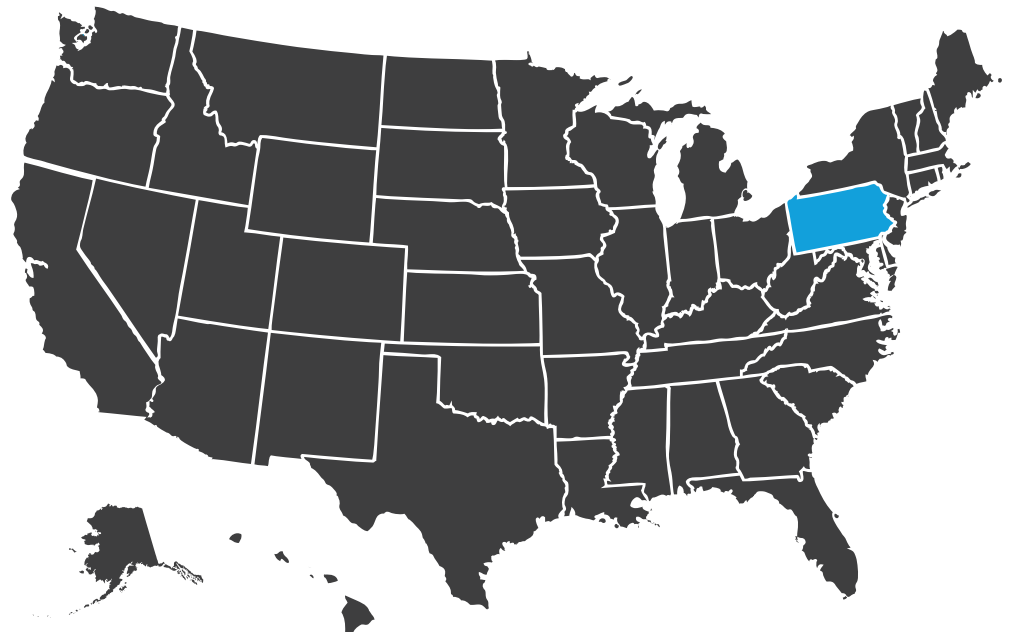
Dawn Brookhart,
Director of Curriculum
and Instruction

In 2014, Danville Area High School was recognized as a National Blue Ribbon School. The high school had the highest scores in the region on the statewide School Performance Profile—92.7 percent and 92.9 percent in the past two years—and was recognized by U.S. News & World Report as being in the top 3.5 percent of best high schools in the nation.

However, DASD's success has been about more than numbers. As Brookhart reported, "Our story is that of creating a common belief system, a shared leadership model, and a systemic approach to aligning our curriculum, instruction, and assessment to the Pennsylvania Core and Common Core standards." She goes on to say, "Study Island played a key role in the transformation of our schools by providing our teachers with the tools necessary to assess, remediate, and enrich all learners."

Going Forward

Success breeds success, and Danville Area School District plans to continue using Study Island to raise achievement for all students at all levels. Because of the success the district has experienced with Study Island, it decided to also begin using Edmentum's Reading Eggs for its youngest learners as a foundational literacy solution in 2014. In recognizing the need to provide a comprehensive educational system that holistically addresses the needs of the learner, the district will continue to make use of technology that teaches transferrable skills and offers differentiated and personalized learning for every student, in every grade, at every level.



Test Preparation & Benchmarking: Equip Your Students for High-Stakes Testing Success

Edmentum’s research-based and proven test-preparation programs provide standards-based instruction and assessment to help you effectively prepare students for success on your state’s assessments. Our suite of solutions provides meaningful benchmarking data and assessment results that help educators pinpoint academic strengths and weaknesses, differentiate their instruction, and target individual student needs.

The Edmentum difference:

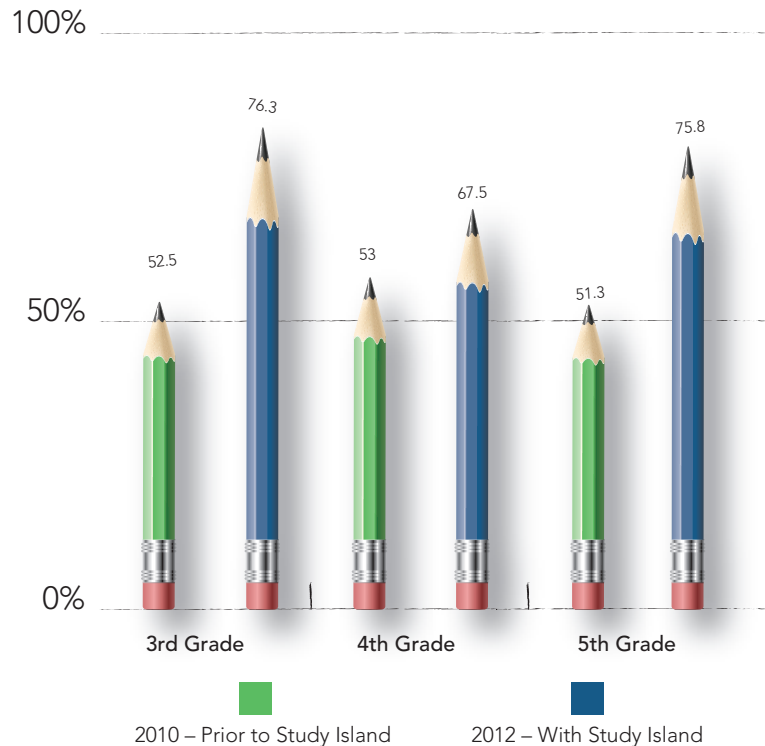
- Proven, research-based test-preparation and benchmarking solutions
- Rigorous and engaging standards-based lessons and activities
- Technology-enhanced item types that mimic those seen in state tests
- Real-time reporting that tracks progress and pinpoints areas that need additional practice and support

Ideal for:

- K–12 students preparing for state standards testing
- High school students preparing for college entrance and placement exams

Portland Elementary School Missouri Assessment Program (MAP) Mathematics Scores

Percentage of students who scored proficient and above after implementing Study Island for math

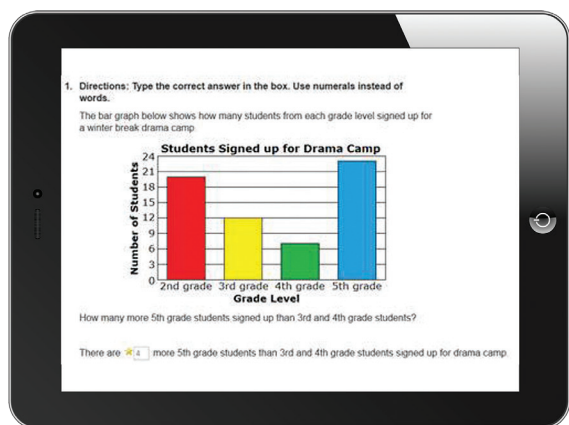


Our Solutions



Study Island's data-driven, standards mastery programs are built to help K–12 students master state standards and improve performance in core and elective curriculum areas. With immediate feedback and built-in remediation capabilities, this solution can help you provide students with both self-paced, individualized learning and teacher-led, whole-class instruction. As the needs of educators across the country continue to evolve, Study Island is continuously updated to provide the most current standards mastery solution.

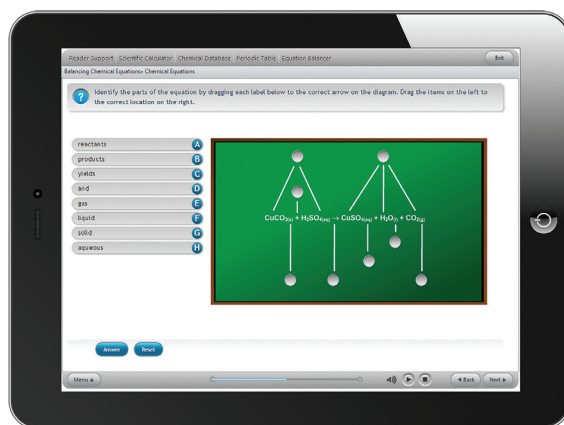
Study Island's benchmarking programs enable teachers to get a snapshot of student proficiencies in relation to state standards. These assessments provide valuable diagnostic information that can be used to drive classroom instruction.



The Plato Courseware Beyond High School Library is a comprehensive online test preparation curriculum. The courses prepare learners for college entrance and placement tests, as well as for career certification and work skills exams. Plato Courseware's rigorous and engaging courses are aligned to each test's objectives.

Plato Courseware prepares learners for the following exams:

- ACT®
- SAT®
- ACCUPLACER®
- COMPASS®
- WorkKeys®
- National Career Readiness Certificate
- ASVAB
- GED®
- HiSET®
- TASC™



Edmentum™ Assessments

Edmentum Assessments provide targeted, self-paced, interactive online instruction mapped to each state's graduation exams. Edmentum Assessments identify skill gaps and prescribe instruction accordingly, maximizing student performance on high-stakes exams.

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