

Learning Foundations

Learning systems, techniques cultivate improved performance

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Special Sections Reporter

Standardized testing acts as a benchmark to measure learning progress and a gateway to higher learning adventures. Achieving a score that truly reflects a readiness to advance is an individualized process based on cognitive improvement, wide vocabulary exposure and a firm learning foundation, according to local professionals.

LearningRX, a national Colorado-based brain training franchise, distinguished the different types of learning in a discussion about college readiness. The organization defines knowledge as information gained from learning, studying and memorizing academic material. IQ, on the other hand, is a measure of intelligence, including spatial reasoning, logical ability and relationships.

"Learning isn't about how much you know, but how effectively you process or handle the information you receive," LearningRX founder Dr. Ken Gibson explained. "Cognitive skills are mechanisms that process incoming information. By strengthening cognitive skills, you'll create a stronger learner, which is what's needed to succeed in college and beyond."

Mike Winchell is the executive director of LearningRX in Fort Collins. Winchell prepares students to face standardized tests head on through targeting specific cognitive weaknesses.

"If I wanted to get the best possible grade, I would do brain training first and then a prep course," Winchell said. "It's kind of like having a gas tank with holes in it. You can continue to pour the gas in and it will just spill out, or you can plug up the holes and then pour more gas in."

Brain training courses at LearningRX boost cognitive weaknesses over a 12 week program to help build basic learning foundations in children and adults alike

through learning exercises. These cognitive brain exercises help people boost memory skills to combat test anxiety, quicken processing speed to facilitate fast problem solving on the clock and improve logical reasoning to accelerate understanding math equations.

"Cognitive training is like taking your brain to the gym," Winchell said.

These Scherman, the CEO of Eduss Learning in Denver, works to help schools focus on teaching educational foundations.

"The school system is forcing teachers to teach kids to pass the test," Scherman said. "A lot of students get taught question formats and how to answer them. Then when they get to grade 5, there is a 50 percent fail rate. Not only do we need to identify gaps in the student's knowledge, but look at where they are at. If you don't address early foundational gaps, they will struggle throughout their entire career."

The Eduss system is a computer program that offers one-on-one teaching for basics that students may have missed at some point in their academic career. The Eduss system then builds on a child's education until the child is at, or accelerating beyond, their age level. Their programs are offered in schools as well as in the home.

Scherman invested in the program because it coaches students to achieve their top potential by evaluating how students arrive at answers, not their ability to spit out answers for a score.

"Standardized tests can come back and tell the teacher a student is struggling but not how or why," Scherman said. "If we can't identify what students have missed across their learning career, then we have a problem. The key is to not allow false markers in the student assessments. If I can give the students the foundations they need to build up, they will succeed on standardized testing. If kids are comfort-

able with basics, teachers don't have to teach to the questions."

Von Collins Huntington Learning Center exam prep coordinator Kimberly Wiggins emphasized the power long-term reading habits create for succeeding on standardized tests.

"Every student should read a minimum of 30 minutes a night," Wiggins said. "High scores are directly correlated with vocabulary exposure. They will get a varied lesson through reading at their grade level."

But colleges want to know students can do more than read, she said. They want to know a student's efficiency, work ethic and ability to study on their own.

"You can't work on strategies unless your skills are right on," Wiggins said. "You have to be able to draw inferences and conclusions and know how to read, not just know how to get a right answer."

For learning the reading habits needed for college, Wiggins recommended the SQ3R method found on college Web sites such as Stanford University at <http://etl.stanford.edu/student/skills/sq3r.pdf>.

"Memorizing is a very primitive reading tool," Wiggins said. "It will work for some content, but you end up working too hard for your buck."

For succeeding on standardized tests and college classes, Wiggins also emphasized improving basic skills such as organization, inference for finding implicit information and paraphrasing to find main ideas in reading passages or word problems. Workbooks will only improve scores by one or two points, she said.

"If you are looking for big jumps, improve your skills," Wiggins said. "Identify which types of questions you miss the most, especially in reading and science. Know yourself as a test taker."

Wiggins hopes students will start to take standardized testing more seriously, as better scores can lead to better opportunities down the road, a lower college dropout rate and in turn create a better society for the next generation.

"Students should take the ACT at a learning center or online their sophomore year



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to get used to it," she said. "Junior and Senior year is when serious prep starts. Your GPA can be subjective, so the ACT will measure those college level skills on a more objective platform. If

the test shows a weakness, really look at it."

For more preparation, check out the free practice tests at www.act.org, www.collegeboard.com and www.gre.org.

The SQ3R Method

This approach helps you get the most out of your reading assignments. It will help you create notes from your reading from which to study.

SURVEY

Carefully pre-read the chapter. Look at the title, subtitles, boldface and italics, graphs and diagrams, summary and/or conclusion, and questions at the end of the chapter.

QUESTION

Reading is a thinking process; inquiry makes you an active reader. Formulate questions before you read. Convert titles, subtitles, etc. into questions. Write these down.

READ

Thoroughly read the chapter and fill in the answers to your questions as you go along. Important: Read for meaning, not only the answers. Write down any information you sense is important.

RECIPE

Talk to yourself. Read your questions, answers and notes out loud. Translate key ideas and new terms into your own words. Research any answers or information that don't seem clear enough.

REVIEW

Reread your notes as often as possible. Frequent review enables you to better retain the material.

Be flexible. At first go through SQ3R step-by-step, and later alter it to suit your own purposes and style.

-Adina Glickman, Center for Teaching and Learning, Stanford University

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