

Standardized Tests and Homeschooling Q&A

Episode 253

Rachel Winchester [00:00:02]:

After hearing about our relaxed approach to education, parents can wonder what about testing? What is the best way to prepare my child for the test? And how do I not transfer my anxiety about the results to them? We're covering all of that and more in today's episode.

You're listening to the Homeschool Made Simple podcast. This is a podcast to help you homeschool simply, inexpensively and enjoyably. Carole Joy Seid has been helping families homeschool for several decades now. And I'm Rachel Winchester, a fellow homeschool mom using this method with my own three kids. In this episode, Carole and I answer your common questions about testing. Listen in.

Today, we're gonna talk about a topic we get some questions on every so often about test taking. And especially in the realm of standardized tests, you know, some states require different levels of standardized testing and stuff. So I just wanted to pick your brain on the topic today, Carole.

Carole Joy Seid [00:01:01]:

Yeah. That's that's really a good question, Rachel, and not one that I think about a lot because most states do not require testing. There are a few, and those families get a lot of gray hair, I think, unnecessarily, but I'd I'd love to talk about it. Where do we start?

Rachel Winchester [00:01:18]:

Yeah. So I guess we could start with standardized tests if somebody is in a state where they have to do standardized tests. I know a friend of mine lives in North Carolina, and I think she has to test every year. So how do you if somebody has to test I guess, maybe let's talk about the younger kids, you know, when before they can read or before they're, like, very good readers. You know, what do you recommend families do if they have to do a standardized test?

Carole Joy Seid [00:01:43]:

So I don't have a lot of experience with this because I've never lived in a state where this was required. But, I from my you know, I glean so much from my families because you're all experts. Mhmm. So many of my families have been very happy with the Peabody test, which does not penalize a child for not reading. And so if you're in that in between stage between when your child can read like they went to Harvard versus they can't read at all, which is what a lot of our families are. It's a short stage, but usually there's a couple years there. The Peabody test, you're reading it to the child. And so it just puts them on an equal footing with, you know, a reading child.

So that would be a great test to look into. Also, a couple little, caveats about testing in general with with these states. First of all, I would make your child the oldest one in their grade. Now it doesn't mean that you have to do that at church or you have to do that when they graduate. They can graduate whenever you want them to graduate. But legally, to make them the oldest child in their classification, puts the the, pressure I should say it takes the pressure off of you because now they're a genius first grader, but they would have been a struggling second grader.

Rachel Winchester [00:03:04]:

Right.

Carole Joy Seid [00:03:04]:

So for legal purposes, that's always a little secret. And then, there's something else I was gonna tell you, and I've lost my train of thought. But keep asking me a question.

Rachel Winchester [00:03:14]:

So if you know, because we tell people to start first grade when their child is seven.

Carole Joy Seid [00:03:19]:

That's right.

Rachel Winchester [00:03:20]:

So then it kinda gives you a leg up in a sense because, okay, most other other people would be starting their kid maybe when they're six or you know, so they're they're older or on the older side so that then they get that advantage of that learning.

Carole Joy Seid [00:03:36]:

And I thought of what to tell you. This is nothing to do with what we're just talking about this minute, but what Dr. Raymond Moore used to say. He say to us, don't even now in in states where this is legally required and you have no choice, you have to play

the game a little bit. And I will talk to them in a minute. But doctor Moore used to say, don't even think about giving your child a standardized test if you have a choice until they're at least, like, ten, fourth grade, that type of thing. Because he would say to us, it's it's or I use the analogy, it's like taking a loaf of bread out of the oven when it's only half baked. And so standardized testing when a child is still in the concrete phase of thinking is just gonna be a no win situation.

So, you know, that's that's one option. Just waiting as long as you can, stalling them as long as you can. But then let's just talk about standardized testing in general and who tests best. So based on Ruth Beechick's study and research, she was a real pioneer in the homeschool movement. In her book, she talks about children who have never taken, let's say, a grammar class or filled in workbook page in grammar or maybe even spelling or vocabulary. Things that, you know, standardized testing supposedly is gonna test you on. But what Ruth would say is they may test you on that, but a child who's never taken a vocabulary test or a spelling test or, you know, any of these kind of busy worky things, studied grammar, in those early years. But a child who's been read to by the hour in utero until the day they get married will knock the socks off of, let's say, a Stanford test, Ruth said, because a child who's been read to has a trained ear.

So a Stanford test will ask you a question like, which of these sentences is not correct or which sentence is correct? You know, however they word it. And Ruth said, a reader will know that. A nonreader will not. And she said, you could be doing grammar from morning until night with your child, but a reader will know the answer to that question, and a non reader will not. And so so many of the things that we worry about with standardized testing actually are moot points. Another, thing, Rachel, is that, in, let's say, Minnesota, I believe I'm I'm not an expert on each state, but I believe it's Minnesota, where you don't have to even show your results unless they're below a certain really, like, red level of Okay. Disaster. And, and even if you do show them, sometimes they just kinda keep their eye on you, but there's not a big punitive result of it.

But homeschool children test across the board on standardized testing approximately 30 to 35% higher than the private and public school peers. So homeschool children test very well, and the reason is because homeschool children tend to be read to and tend to be more literary themselves. So laying late nights about standardized testing. I always like to tease families, worry about the ozone layer more than this because it's just not an issue because homeschool children test so well, generally speaking. Now there are truant people who call themselves homeschoolers.

And, you know but even those kids very often shock everybody and turn out brilliantly because they're unschooled even though their mother doesn't even know the term. They're you know? But they really are. And so they're inventing things their backyards that are genius level. You know? So I don't worry too much about homeschoolers. I'm not now if you're using screens, I worry about you. Like, that's different. You see that? I don't consider that a child who's being raised with my methodology. So that would be very much opposed to what I teach, and I think you're cutting the feet off of yourself when you're using screens in your home and wondering why your child, for example, doesn't want to read.

Doesn't has interest in books. Well, who would if Walt Disney can come and babysit them for four hours a day? I wouldn't wanna read a book either. I'd just beep her turn on an another screen, another video, another whatever it is, another screen. And so I just feel like if you do what we teach, your children will test very, very well. That's the only thing I can stand by. I can't answer the other methods.

Rachel Winchester [00:08:23]:

Yeah. I'm also thinking about in the *Read Aloud Handbook* when Jim Trelease talks about, the principle of, like, just if children read if if their children are read to, then they're introduced to so many words. And so their vocabulary is, like, exponentially larger than children who are not read to. And so then how they have this advantage that just continues to grow and grow and grow. And I feel like that also has to come in play because they're not coming across they're they're most likely familiar, at least have heard what they're reading about or whatever they're being asked to do. You know, they probably have the vocabulary to have experience so that to not be, like, confused about what is being referred to even, but just they they have such a larger vocabulary to begin with. They're more likely to understand the question or the content in and of itself.

Carole Joy Seid [00:09:27]:

Yes. And so a lot of families, you know, take logic classes and things like that, which I have, you know, nothing against at all. I love the idea. But I feel that reading great books naturally teaches you how to think logically. So you're in Solzhenitsyn's mind or Charles Dickens or Jane Austen Austen or Henry James. And these people, and their their high level thought becomes your high level thought. You you model who you're exposed to, and you become like that person. And you start thinking like Jane Austen.

Would that be wonderful? So it just it it's so natural. Instead of using a textbook trying to create these things, great books do it painlessly while your children are reading under the covers with a flashlight or begging for one more chapter. This this is a dream

come true. This is education that is so joy filled instead of so traumatic and dry and deadly.

Rachel Winchester [00:10:30]:

It's intuitive. Instead of, like, forcing something to happen, it becomes intuitive because it's just those books pattern onto them. And so they start to especially if they keep listening or reading them over and over again, the ones they especially like, you know, they'll really imbibe that way of thinking or the character development. All those things will really leave a mark even if it's not articulated to someone. It still is doing its work on them.

Carole Joy Seid [00:10:59]:

Exactly. And and that's also why listening to audiobooks in addition to being read to because mommy and daddy's voice only lasts so long. But, combining that with, you know, some audiobooks that are well read, because sometimes if a child is just reading to themselves and not being read to, they'll start to see words that they don't know how they're pronounced. Mhmm. I have funny little stories of when JJ was a little boy, he talked about Chaos one time, and we were like, what's chaos? With chaos. And, you know, but he was he was pronouncing it as it was written Right. Or negligee, you know, or, you know, things like that because he'd read these old English novels or whatever. And and that word would be used not what we think of as a negligee today, like, from Victoria's Secret.

But it like, that meant, like, an at home gown, you know, that a woman in Victorian times would wear and stuff. And he had seen that word, and but he didn't know because he hadn't heard it read. So a lot of times, children will get to an age where they don't want to be read to because they can read so fast. And and but push through that. Don't let them just say, oh, well, I guess we're done with that. Not at all. I've never an adult that didn't love to be read to. So just say, well, that's okay.

You can read that one to yourself, but this one, we're gonna read as a family, and there's gonna be all hands on deck for this book. It's too important for you to read by yourself. So finding that balance.

Rachel Winchester [00:12:30]:

Yes. So when a when a child's older, like, when they do the, I guess, PSAT or kind of when they're doing older tests you take when you're older, yeah, what do you kind of say about that?

Carole Joy Seid [00:12:43]:

Good question. So Dr. Moore used to say that those were the, coin of the realm in education and that he said, don't be don't be ashamed or embarrassed to play the game with, college boards. So he recommended as I do as well, taking a prep test, like, a prep course. I'm sorry. A prep course, like, at a junior college or, you know, you can do them online, I suppose, nowadays. But it's really important for your child to have test savvy knowing that in a in a college board test, the way that the sections are laid out, the the first part of each section are the hardest. Then the middle part is the next hardest, and then the ending are the the ones that are, like, the hail Mary pass. Like, nobody's gonna be able to get these, but you can So what what they explain in these classes is so just do the beginning sections of all of them, then do the middle sections.

Then if you still have time, you can jump into those really impossible ones, and maybe you might get one. But but if you get stuck in section one and think this is so impossible and you're paralyzed and you never go through the rest of the easy questions, you see, these are things that you wouldn't know just walking in off the street or getting dropped out of a spaceship. Who would know?

Rachel Winchester [00:14:01]:

Right.

Carole Joy Seid [00:14:02]:

But take these classes. They're really, really helpful in just making you test smart. And then take the the, test themselves multiple times. Several times not for where it doesn't really count, where you're not paying any money, but then also take it multiple times when you are because you just statistically, your scores will continue to rise just by the familiarity and the confidence that you feel as you're, you know, retaking it. And then the PSAT, of course, we take, as many times as we want, but it only counts for the, National Merit Scholarship the autumn of your junior year. So make sure that, your kids are familiar with the test before they walk walk in on that. If you become a National Merit Scholar or even a National Merit runner-up, every major college in America will be courting you with scholarship dollars.

Rachel Winchester [00:14:58]:

Wow.

Carole Joy Seid [00:14:58]:

So it's a wonderful thing to have if you can pull that off. And because our kids test so well, there's no reason why we're not just grinding out National Merit Scholars. So and

then the SAT, which I personally prefer to the ACT, I think the SAT is more of a reading test. And so homeschoolers being readers, generally, tend to do, really well on the SAT. And, play it for all it's worth. You know? Use it as a lever to get into the school or the career, you know, that that you really feel that that your child belongs in. It's just another tool, but it is it puts us on an equal playing ground. I was speaking with a parent the other day, and they're telling me how smart their child was and because I think maybe we were talking about really tough college or something.

Carole Joy Seid [00:15:50]:

I can't remember the context of where I was like, well, yeah, you you can try that. That sounds good. You know? But I didn't know. Her child is a brand new family I've never worked with before. But then she told me and he took his SAT, and she told me what his score was. And I said, okay. Yes. Now now that's the the great equalizer because admissions offices, you know, mommy and daddy are like, oh, Joey's so smart and, you know, for all the books he's read, which, of course, definitely impresses them.

Carole Joy Seid [00:16:19]:

But when they see your college board scores, now you've got their attention.

Rachel Winchester [00:16:25]:

Yeah. So then in a daily sort of rhythm of, like, just in normal life when you're doing what do you recommend people do? Like, what is the role of test taking and quizzes in a literature based education?

Carole Joy Seid [00:16:39]:

I'd say the role is very, very small. So it's a tutorial method. You are sitting face to face with your child. And now now you're gonna give him a test to see if he was engaging with what you know, he just was talking to you about five minutes before and and, you know, processing with you, and he's outside playing what you just read out loud to him and, you know, all that. So I don't see testing as a big part of our methodology. Some families, feel that, you know, how will we know? And I say to them, how you know is that you're practically breathing out of the same nostril all day long. Like, you are completely you're joined at the hip with your children. Trust me.

When they're begging you for one more chapter, you know that they're engaging. When they talk about it, when when daddy comes home for dinner and you say, kids, tell daddy what we read about in Door the Wall tonight today. And they're like, oh, dad. Woah. So Robin, you know he's in the monastery. You know the monks and you know, they eat beef stew with marigolds in them like flowers. And then, dad, then he was making this cross and then he broke it and and and and you're sitting there going,

did not miss one detail of what I read. And here I thought he was just coloring while I was reading to him.

So I think it's more of a verbal, communication. But having said that, I do not believe in legalistically making children recite what you've just read to them. I think that is a real killer of joy, and it makes children not want to be read to at all. But if just in the normal course of conversation, just like when you go to a great restaurant or you like, I went to see the Reagan movie, which was filmed on my street, and my house is in it. Everything was really fun to see, and it was a marvelous, edifying movie that the Lord was really glorified in. And so what did I do after I watched that movie? I told every person that I could grab on the street, you must go see this movie. Well, when a child's excited about a book, that's what they do.

They talk about it. They bore you to tears sometimes talking about it. But that's how we know whether a child is internalizing what we're exposing them to.

Rachel Winchester [00:18:55]:

Which I guess if they're doing a math or something like that

Carole Joy Seid [00:18:59]:

Different. Yes. Of course. Good point, Rachel. I mean, math books and math programs come with testing built into them. So math is a is a subject you want to constantly be just kind of checking in on. Good point. I I guess I'm so humanities thought.

I'm always thinking about the humanities, but, absolutely, math is not something that you get out of the ozone, and it is some yes. And that's why John Saxon in his later you know, he wrote books for older kids. Now the company has been sold, and I don't recommend the younger books. But starting at six five, the whole idea is you repeat, you repeat, you repeat, and that is how you make sure that your child is maintaining what they've learned throughout the whole year, that they didn't forget what they learned by January, what they learned in September, but that it's all part of his rhythm. And so every day, you're seeing how many if you don't miss two, then you get to do the odds or the evens is, you know, my methodology. So there's always that repetition that is checking for accuracy and hopefully speed as well.

Rachel Winchester [00:20:12]:

Yeah. That's great. Very good. Well, I I think this is helpful for people to kinda get some bearings on testing and just feel like they can breathe and make some decisions with some confidence. So thanks for sharing.

Carole Joy Seid [00:20:28]:

Can I one thing that I just thought of that I about is on the day of cons of, testing in in states where it's required, make it like a big party day. Like, a big fun, you know, meal that the kids will be excited about. Have you know, like, make it a party so that you deal, with the expectation of testing in a positive way instead of a negative way. And children will pick this up from you. They've never been exposed to stand by, isn't they? They have no But if you're like, oh, oh, tomorrow is your stand standardized test. And, oh, I hope you do well and, you know, praying and fasting in front of your children wearing sackcloth. Oh, you know, I just hope we don't go to jail after this test.

You know? That is just gonna obviously send a message to your child. This is something to be nervous about. But instead, put on your cheerleading costume and said, you are gonna rock this. You are gonna just nail this. You are so smart, and this is gonna be so fun. And I wouldn't necessarily tell your children the results other than just say you did great, period. Not a big deal about it, but just make it positive, never negative.

Rachel Winchester [00:21:48]:

Yes. And I think that maybe that is part of the problem or the instinctive kind of response for a lot of parents is then to kind of it brings up their anxiety because their reputation is on the line here, and then they start to feel anxious and worried about it. And then that is what gets conveyed to the child, whereas, like you're saying, they have no understanding otherwise about testing. They have no reason to think that, oh, something's gonna happen that's bad or whatever. And so then to just be able to make it, to keep your anxieties to yourself

Carole Joy Seid [00:22:26]:

That's right.

Rachel Winchester [00:22:27]:

And give them to God and let it be just like, oh, this is a game we're playing, you know, especially if it's a Peabody or something, you know. Oh, this is just a little game we're gonna play and, you know, have fun with it. Yeah.

Carole Joy Seid [00:22:40]:

I think of one little cute anecdote. Years and years and years ago, I was working with a family. I think they're in Minnesota. And they their kids had been, I believe, in private school, and they're very, very burned out. And so they had horses and just a really lovely life. And so I said, let's just give your kids some time off. I want you to read to them, put them to hard manual labor out on the land and with the animals and

everything. And but, yes, it was Minnesota because they have standardized testing that's required.

So the mom calls me up, and she's like, oh, I'm so nervous. I gotta have standardized testing. I'm like, oh, they'll do great. They'll do great. And so I'm out in the garage working, and the phone rings. And it's this mom, and she goes, Carole, they they all went up three grades in one year, and we didn't even do school. And I'm like, well, now wait a minute. You are doing school, but it didn't look like what they'd done, you know, at the private school that they'd previously been so traumatized by.

But it was like sometimes these standardized testing experiences are so encouraging because we you know, they're like, well, Carole says this works, but I don't know. You know, they may all wound up, you know, working, flipping burgers rest of their lives, and then they get the test scores back. They're like, So kind of it could be a blessing

Rachel Winchester [00:24:00]:
Totally.

Carole Joy Seid [00:24:01]:
Affirming that what they're doing is working. So it could be a very positive thing.

Rachel Winchester [00:24:07]:
Yes. Yes. Absolutely. I think that's definitely what I saw with my friend when she went through it with her daughter. It ended up being like, okay. We're doing fine. Everything is everything is great.

Carole Joy Seid [00:24:20]:
It's awesome. It's a joy. It's a blessing, and it will just affirm that what you're doing is the right thing for your children. And not all children test well, but most homeschool children test better once they homeschool.

Rachel Winchester [00:24:36]:
Yep. That's great. Well, thank you very much.

Carole Joy Seid [00:24:39]:
Thank you.

Rachel Winchester [00:24:40]:
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