

Our Trip Takes Us

By Becky Hirn

No matter which way you look at the Ohio Achievement Assessment, it is a test. Public school students either spend the entire year preparing to meet state standards or they're educated at a level that will inherently give them the skills needed to pass the test. This test is new for us. First, because Abby's never been a public school student faced with the big test. And second I've never been so involved in her education.

Since the test is only offered at specific times, Abby and I were back in Ohio last week for the OAA. And it was like many things on the trip, a whole new experience. While waiting in the lobby at the test site, it was easy to recognize the parallel between this test and our trip this year. Are we as proficient at traveling as we told our parents, friends, even the newspaper that we would be? Have we shown that we have the basic skills to make a tour around the country? It certainly has been a test of our parenting, marriage, money management and many other life skills.

Some people have a negative way of saying they "teach to the test" in schools. If this means giving kids a good idea what they're up against on test day, I'm all for it. I wish someone could have "taught to the trip" for me. I don't think there's anything wrong with brushing up on the state requirements, taking practice tests, and learning test-taking strategies. These seem more like the equipment in an educator's toolbox. It's exactly what Abby and I have been doing. We used Study Island, which is a test preparation website. We checked out the Ohio Department of Education website which offered the tests from previous years and we used other test preparation booklets and materials during class time.

I have my own toolbox for the trip. They are the books and websites describing every aspect of RV travel, from efficient use of space in storage compartments to safety tips on how to brake when you get a flat tire. I've scoured discussion forums on www.rv.net and joined online groups like www.familiesontheroad.com. All of these resources help me manage the test.

Besides teaching to the test, there's another line of thinking that says if you really educate students, they will have the natural ability to perform well on the test. I find this partly true too. Experience is the only way to learn some things. That's why in science class, instead of reading about how acids and bases react, we dip litmus papers in liquids and watch them turn red and blue. In the RV, I can read about it all day, but there's nothing like experiencing the freedom of the road, the fear of a breakdown and the disgust when the dump station overflows. That's learning.

In the end I taught to the test and I educated Abby with experiences to prepare her for the test. It was similar to preparing for our big adventure. We looked at what people had done before and learned as much as we could all year. Will she pass the test? Will we?

On her test it will be pretty clear by the bubbles she filled in. There will be a grade. But for our own, I guess it depends on who's grading the test.

Becky Hirn is a Delphos resident traveling America with her family for a year. She documents the journey at www.ourtriptakesus.com. Follow the Hirn family in photos, blogs, on Facebook and Twitter. Or learn how to partner with the trip as an advertiser. You may e-mail Becky at beckyhirn@ourtriptakesus.com