

## The Ultimate Test: Everyone passes this school exam, and it may help teachers teach

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Your third-grader goes off to school to take the Big Test. The grade comes home the next day: She got a "D." And you're perfectly happy, only a little surprised. You were sure she would either score a "C" – or even an "S."

This strange new world of testing is a reality in Frisco's Noel A. Smith Elementary School. It's giving teachers and students a taste of today's corporate world – personality tests to understand differences in the way people behave and interact.

Tailor-made for school purposes, these tests appear to be a useful tool for educators – perhaps even a breakthrough in the way that students are labeled, understood and, most important, accepted.

Here's how it works: At the beginning of this school year, staff at Smith tested 370 students by showing each a series of illustrations and asking pertinent questions. Test time averaged about 35 minutes per student.

Based on their answers, students received one of four "grades": D, for Dominant (outgoing and task-oriented); I, for Inspiring (outgoing and people-oriented); C, for Cautious (reserved and task-oriented); and S, for Supportive (reserved and people-oriented).

While probing personality types is familiar to the business world, it was an eye-opener in the school atmosphere.

Think of the students with reputations as unduly bossy, shy, fidgety, bookish, rambunctious, chatty, show-offy, passive, demanding, distracted, bigheaded, mouthy or mousy.

What a wonder when they fell into different categories resembling kids, not just problems awaiting solutions.

The testing provided parents with new insight on their children and how they fit in the big swirl of pint-sized humanity at school. And the testing provided teachers with sometimes new and important information.

Even without the test, many veteran teachers certainly know how to size up a child and find ingenious ways to individually guide, prod, reassure, calm or inspire every person in the classroom. But the personality test is a potentially invaluable addition to any teacher's toolbox, something to use when other approaches seem to fall short.

The Smith testing program is just a test in itself, a pilot that started off the school year that just ended in Frisco on Friday. The school administration hasn't decided yet whether to give it another year.

Regardless, the very approach is something every educator and parent can tuck away when groping for insight into the little enigmas otherwise known as kids.

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