

Frequently Asked Math Questions for VCA Parents

Elementary School

What is a math facts timed test?

In grades two through five, basic math facts are tested at least once every week. The grade level and corresponding timed test parameters are shown in the following table.

Elementary Math Timed Tests

Grade	Math Facts Tested	Timed Test
2	+ –	26 facts in 3 minutes—addition and subtraction combined, 12 fact families
3	+ – x ÷	100 facts per operation. One operation at a time. 3 ½ minutes, or demonstrated proficiency
4	+ – x ÷	100 facts per operation. One operation at a time. 3 minutes or demonstrated proficiency
5	+ – x ÷	100 facts per operation. One operation at a time. 2 ½ minutes or demonstrated proficiency

Why are timed math facts tests important?

Students may understand concepts (such as regrouping in addition and subtraction), but solutions may still be incorrect due to inaccuracy of facts. In upper elementary, if students do not know the basic addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division facts, they are handicapped when it comes to computation skills. It is frustrating to the students to not be able to work problems as fast as others because of the barrier of not knowing the basic facts. Middle school expects students to come already knowing the basic facts.

Why are story problems important?

The goal in elementary school math is to equip our students to 1.) have a good math foundation for the next grade's math curriculum, and 2.) be able to be proficient enough to apply math in real life situations. Story problems represent real life math situations. Word problems are solved using specific strategies that need to be taught consistently and cumulatively throughout the grade school years.

Half of the math component on the standardized SAT test for elementary school is comprised of story problems. When students get into high school, ALL math problems on the Ohio Graduation Test are story problems. We owe it to our students to give them a strong foundation in story problem strategies.

What happens if my child is “behind” or “ahead” in math?

If your child is behind in math, there are several strategies available.

1. Extra practice at home. Your child may need some consistent math drill at home. This may mean one-on-one flashcard practice with a parent, or extra practice using a tool such as a game, manipulatives, or a computer program. There are math websites where specific skills may be drilled and reinforced in fun, appealing ways. Ask your child's teacher for a suggestion.

2. Pupil Services. There are specific criteria established which indicate whether a child may receive math help in a small group setting in the “Ark” or Resource Room. These are special areas where students receive more individualized instruction at a level more effective for his/her success in math. This assignment is made upon recommendation of the classroom teacher, testing, small group availability, and parent permission. Students who receive special services are usually one or more grade levels behind.

3. Tutoring. Some faculty members are available for after-school tutoring per an hourly fee.

If your child is ahead in math.

Students are assessed in each grade level. A supplementary curriculum is available to enrich students within the regular classroom environment while making sure that the basic concepts are mastered. To qualify for this supplementary classroom curriculum, students must meet pre-determined criteria. A conference may be established on an individual basis regarding enrichment beyond the regular grade level curriculum.

Why did my child’s math grade fall in the middle of the year?

The first grading period is a review of concepts learned the previous year and is generally easier than succeeding quarters. As the year progresses, the curriculum increases in difficulty. Since classroom routines are in place after the first quarter, often the pace and work expectations also increase. This gradual incline in the content and work standard is how students are brought to grade level proficiency so they are ready for the next grade at the end of the year. A significant drop in grades could possibly be an indication that one or more of the following situations exists:

1. Decrease in student effort
2. Decline in work/organizational disciplines
3. Challenging content has not been met with an increase in individual study
4. Something is going on in the family that is distracting attention away from homework
5. Absences have caused him/her to fall behind and/or miss important concepts
6. Undiagnosed illness

What should I do if my child’s math grade has fallen?

1. **Start at home.** Sit back and look to see if anything is going on that would prevent your child from succeeding in school. Ask yourself these questions:

- A. Has our family been too busy to allow my child time to complete homework without being tired or rushed?
- B. Is he/she doing the work that isn’t tangible—like studying for tests?
- C. Has he/she made up all work from absences? (And turned it in!)
- D. Have I looked over the papers that have come home?
- E. Have I noticed an unusual increase in papers that have come home with notes from teachers?
- F. Is he/she getting enough sleep?
- G. Is he/she eating a good breakfast?
- H. Is there something going on that is distracting his/her mind from schoolwork?
- I. Does he/she need help and parents haven’t been available?

2. Contact the teacher.

- A. Send your child's teacher an e-mail, note, or call with your concern and ask for his/her input.
- B. Offer to come in for a conference.
- C. LISTEN to the teacher. He/She wants your child to succeed and may have insights that will help. Ask questions for understanding.
- D. Share any pertinent information the teacher should know about your child that he/she may not know.
- E. Work out a plan with the teacher so that home and school can work together to help the child succeed. (Keeping up with the assignment notebook is often a first step.)

3. Be willing to make changes where possible. It may mean your child might have to sacrifice a sports practice or a favorite TV show. It may take a little more time or effort from a parent, but your child is worth it!

As a parent, what can I do to promote math concepts at home?

1. Work on helping your child memorize the basic addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division basic facts. You will be helping them for life.
2. Insist on neatness with math work:
 - A. Problems numbered according to the assignment.
 - B. Adequate space between problems.
 - C. Legible number formation.
 - D. Computation done with numbers in straight lines relative to the operation.
3. Be aware of the concepts that are being taught at school by checking the teacher letters, grade level website, and papers coming home. Any extra practice at home with these concepts will help the child internalize them.
4. Apply math to everyday situations.
 - A. Ask your child to tell what time it is using an analog clock.
 - B. Ask your child to count coins, or make change.
 - C. Give your child opportunities to measure ingredients for a recipe or craft.
 - D. Let your child be the one to figure out how much money will be needed to buy the loaf of bread and milk at the store. Then how much change will be needed from the \$10 bill.
5. Play math games in the car to promote mental math skills.
6. Play board games that involve math computation or critical thinking skills.
7. With supervision, allow your child to practice math using math websites.