

## Text of Keysor Podcast, April 2008

I took a lot of standardized tests as a kid. You no doubt did too. Many long, quiet hours bubbling in circles with my trusty Number 2 pencil. Over the years I took the Iowa Test of Basic Skills and the California Achievement Test – and I never once lived in Iowa or California. Teachers spent thirty-five weeks teaching from the curriculum and one week giving tests that had little connection to what they'd taught the rest of the year. Tests were developed by huge testing companies to give districts across the country a measure of how students could perform on a series of multiple choice items. They were designed to rank and compare us with others. We all fit into a bell curve. For every student who did well, someone statistically had to fail. That's the way things used to be.

Our adult opinions about standardized tests are understandably shaped from our personal experiences. The MAP tests our children take each spring are thankfully very different than tests you and I probably took as kids. And there are many things about these tests parents may not know or understand. For example:

- The MAP tests have been purposefully designed to reflect Missouri's Grade Level Expectations (GLEs) in reading and math – a set of expectations designed by Missouri citizens for Missouri's students. Do the tests have anything to do with what we teach at Keysor? Absolutely. Kirkwood's curriculum, our expectations of kids and teachers, and the rubrics used to understand our report cards are all aligned with the state GLEs. The standardized tests, while only one measure of student achievement, thus reflect the teaching and learning we do throughout the year and can be used to inform our teaching.
- The MAP tests are loaded with multiple choice items – they're easier and cheaper for the state to score, but they also include short answer questions and more complex problems called performance events. Some items are worth multiple points and students can earn partial credit on these. These items measure students' thinking and their ability to explain their answers.
- The ultimate goal of MAP testing is for all students to succeed, not for kids to fall into a bell curve of success, mediocrity, and failure. No Child Left Behind, at the federal level, calls for all children – 100%, to be proficient on standardized tests by the year 2014. A daunting and challenging task? Absolutely it is, but to shoot for anything less is unthinkable.
- Missouri's standardized tests are rigorous and quite difficult. Student results will fall into one of four categories: Advanced, Proficient, Basic, and Below Basic. We want students to be Proficient or better, and one might assume proficiency equates to grade level performance. This is a fair assumption but it isn't true; a score at the proficient level on the MAP actually reflects "above grade level" understandings and performance. Rigorous, difficult, and a bit misleading.
- Truth be told, the MAP tests are low stakes for your children. Kids won't be retained if they are Basic on the test, and they won't get an A if they score at the Advanced level. The tests are incredibly high stakes, though, for our school, our district, and our community. Right or wrong, we're measured by students' achievement on MAP tests and our scores impact funding, morale, and even property values in our community.

Our children are intelligent and talented, and they've been well taught by our outstanding teachers. What's left in our work for testing success? Motivation is critical, as is kids' commitment to taking their time, attending to the task, and doing their best. Children and parents need to care about the tests and want to do well. We know kids will be anxious. We're anxious too. Rest assured we'll do everything possible to calm kids' nerves and encourage their success. We call our testing period "The Big Show" because it's our chance to show the world all we know and can do. We greatly appreciate your support in these endeavors, and throughout the entire school year. With your continued help, we'll have good news to share in August.