

A Letter to Parents about Test Scores

Dear Parents:

When 3rd-9th graders receive MEAP scores from tests taken last fall, students who have sailed over the test's hurdles in years past may not get over the bar.

That's not necessarily because students are achieving less on the MEAP; they may, in fact, be achieving more. But the state is raising the bar— that is, raising the minimum score a student must reach to pass the test – so that what was “passing” last year could be “failing” this year.

Raising the bar isn't necessarily a bad thing – most folks want schools to raise standards – but when a student who has always done well on the MEAP suddenly turns up with a failing score, parents may rightfully believe someone “has some explaining to do.”

That's what this letter is about. To help you understand what these scores and the larger test issues mean for your child, your schools, and Michigan, we'll explain:

- **What** has changed and why your child and many others who may have been proficient on MEAP tests before may not pass the test this year
- **What** MEAP test scores mean for your child's success in school
- **What** MEAP, MME and ACT test scores mean as children graduate and move on to college
- **What** is behind Michigan's decision to raise MEAP passing grades, or “cut scores”
- **What** this change will do to Michigan education

What has changed in the MEAP program, and why are more children likely to fail the tests?

The MEAP, which stands for Michigan Education Assessment Program, is Michigan's way of evaluating the education delivered in its more than 550 school districts across the state. Every fall students in 3rd-9th grade spend as much as a week taking tests in math (grades 3-8); reading (grades 3-8); writing (grades 4 and 7); science (grades 5 and 8); and social studies (grades 6 and 9). In early spring, the results come back with analysis from the state on how student scores compare with last year's and how schools and districts measure up against the rest of Michigan.

A year ago, when scores came back, they looked



André Teysck, Belgium

Michigan is raising the bar on MEAP; we're all going to need to jump higher

good in every subject but writing. Roughly 85 percent of Michigan students passed their math test, 84 percent passed the reading test, 75 percent passed the social studies exam, and 73 percent passed the science test. (Only 48 percent passed the writing test, which had recently been revised.)

The state said “good job!” and school districts turned to their staff and students and said “good job!” too. We were jumping the hurdles!

But now the state says it's time to make the challenge tougher. It is not changing the tests, but upping the passing score for every test but writing, and as it raises the hurdles, students and schools are going to have to jump higher. For example, 3rd graders last year had to answer 34 percent of the questions right on the math test to get a passing score. Now they must get 72 percent of the questions right on that test to pass. *(We can all point out that 34 percent is a very low passing score, kind of like a knee-high hurdle, but we didn't set the course or make the rules; that's the state's job. We just try to explain them.)*

The result of raising hurdles and upping passing scores is that fewer students will pass the tests, and even students who do better than they did last year may well go from passing last year to failing this year (i.e., a 3rd grader who got 45 percent of the questions right on last year's math test and gets 65 percent right on this year's test would still be counted as passing last year and failing this year, since the state's new minimum 3rd grade math passing score is 72 percent.

(Over, please)

What do MEAP scores mean for your child's success in school?

MEAP scores do not relate to your child's grades or determine whether or not your child is keeping up with his or her peers in school. They show your child's performance in a particular subject on the day he or she took the test – and when compared with last year and the year before provide data on your child's academic growth. They also can help pinpoint the necessary skills your child has mastered and those skills on which he or she needs work.

What do MEAP, MME and ACT test scores mean as your child graduates and goes on to college?

Once your child reaches grade 11, MEAP is over. At that level, students take the MME (Michigan Merit Exam) which has two main parts: 1) The ACT national college admissions test, and 2) Additional questions that comprise the balance of the MME. Together they cover English, writing, reading, science math, and social studies. ***It is important to note that the new higher MEAP passing scores will also apply to the MME, so fewer students will be passing those tests when they are taken later this year.***

Before 2009 the state awarded college scholarships to those who passed the MME, but since that was dropped the MME in total has no significant impact on high school graduation or college admission. However, virtually every college requires and considers a student's ACT score as a basis for admission, so that part of the test is critical for all college-bound students.

What is behind Michigan's decision to raise MEAP (and MME) passing scores?

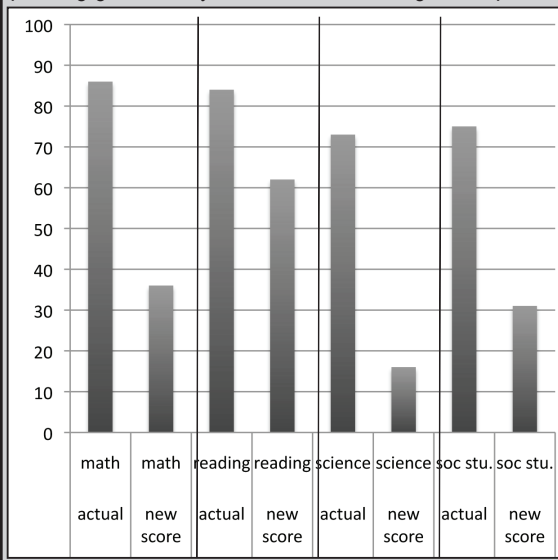
The federal No Child Left Behind Act plays a key part. That act requires all students be 100 percent proficient in reading and math for their grade level by the year 2013-14. Michigan, designating students as "proficient" with a passing score of only 34 percent, clearly had a ways to go. By making a big jump in its passing scores and demonstrating that it is moving toward what the feds call "career- and college-ready" standards, Michigan hopes to receive a waiver that will allow it more time to reach 100 percent proficiency.

What will this do to Michigan education?

Initially, MEAP scores will look bad for most every district and the state at large. Gradually, over the next few years, scores will rise, as they typically do, until the state makes some other change in the tests

Passing rates could drop from 80s to 30s

How many fewer students will pass the MEAP? The state has not yet made public its statewide scores for this year, but the chart below shows how the passing rates would have dropped if the new scores were applied in 2011 instead of 2012. For each pair of bars, the one at left shows the percent of Michigan students earning a passing grade last year, and the bar at right, the percent who would



have earned a passing grade had the new higher scores been applied in 2011. The 2012 Michigan results are expected to look much like the bars on the right.

themselves, the passing scores, the way they count the scores, etc. (changes are typical, too) and then scores will drop down again for a year.

Some will point to the lower passing rates and say "Our schools are failing!" even though the actual achievement level may be higher than it was last year, when the state said "good job!"

Ultimately, raising the hurdles will cause all of us, students and staff, to jump higher and try harder. When it comes to MEAP, our students score at or above state averages in most areas. We're working very hard now, but we always want to do more and do better. We'll continue to innovate and make strides to boost learning, implementing a strong state-aligned curriculum, providing special programs to enhance reading and writing skills, seeking out new math initiatives for AMA ESD's schools.

What matters is your child and his or her achievement, not just on MEAP tests, but now and for the long term, as a foundation for life. It's our job – and we're on it. If you have questions, please call.

Sincerely,

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