

# RECOVERING Teaching Time

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F R E N Z Y

THE NATION'S EDUCATIONAL TESTING FRENZY IS NOTHING NEW, BUT IT COULD BE WORSE. MISSOURI NEA AND NEA LEADERS ARE WORKING TO PROTECT INSTRUCTIONAL TIME AND EVERY CHILD'S RIGHT TO A GREAT PUBLIC EDUCATION.



**Standardized testing** has been around since the early 1900s. It's nothing new, but its value has changed over the years. Today, decision makers look to standardized tests for answers that many educators argue tests don't deliver. Furthermore, testing has taken a front-row seat, and some think that seat has shoved important instruction to the back row.

As education-reform legislation grew more commonplace, beginning with the 1983 "A Nation at Risk" report, policy makers began to demand increased accountability for student achievement in exchange for school funding. As the reform kept coming, so did the emphasis on standardized tests. Policy makers saw them as a quick, inexpensive way to measure what students know. Technical advances allowed people to compile and analyze large amounts of data, and quantification of student knowledge gave test results an air of infallibility. The ability to analyze student test scores inexpensively overrode questions of reliability and validity of both the tests and the analysis of scores.

"Today, not only has the testing frenzy gone overboard, but adding to the fury is the notion that tests

are absolute reflections of whether or not an education institution and its educators are doing their job," says Missouri NEA Teaching and Learning Director Ann Jarrett. "Billionaire businessmen like Rex Sinquefeld believe business principles, when applied to schools, improve results. These principles include a strong belief in the absolute value of data and the power of incentives to change behavior and outcomes. These extremists fund private foundations to push their agenda for school reforms and accept standardized test results as nearly the sole measure of success."

The expansion of standardized testing mandated in the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 2001, No Child Left Behind, produced income and profits for testing companies.

"These very profitable companies lobby to protect and expand their market," says MNEA Legislative Director Otto Fajen. "Despite the fact that student achievement grew slower under yearly testing mandates than it did before annual testing was required, policy makers do not want to relax testing requirements."



**Do you believe testing is overrated?** Weigh in at [www.mnea.org/testing](http://www.mnea.org/testing). Share your ideas for solutions and find more information on standardized testing.





# NEA advocacy efforts

With ESEA long overdue for reauthorization, NEA works for changes in ESEA to reduce the heavy emphasis on state assessments. More importantly, NEA works to prevent implementation of measures that would raise the stakes tied to state assessments.

“Many people who want to allocate public money to private schools seem to thrive on the idea of using test scores to label schools as failing,” says Missouri NEA Teaching and Learning Director Ann Jarrett.

“When Congress failed to reauthorize the ESEA, NEA asked the U.S. Department of Education to use its powers under the act to provide waivers,” Jarrett adds. “Without such waivers, every school in the country would be labeled failing, and districts would continue to pay outside providers millions of dollars for supplemental services that do not help students.”

Waivers offered in 2011 included strings that NEA opposed. Among those is the inclusion of student scores on state tests as a factor for teacher evaluation.

MNEA worked closely with the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to reduce the focus on state test scores in teacher evaluation. Because of MNEA’s efforts, Missouri’s model teacher evaluation system embeds student learning in the evaluation rubric rather than applying a weight to test scores. School district decision makers determine how to measure student growth in learning

and how that is figured into teacher evaluation. The U.S. Department of Education required that Missouri’s waiver include language stating that school districts must ensure that educators who receive evaluations of proficient or higher show student growth through state assessments for tested grades or district assessments in other grades.

Missouri is among a small number of states that require the use of multiple measures of student learning in teacher evaluation and leaves the decisions about these measures to local school districts. The use of multiple measures reduces the effect of standardized test scores on teacher evaluations.

Educators don’t have to sit on the sidelines and wait to see what new curve the testing culture will throw their way. Through their MNEA local affiliate, they can work for change that improves their schools.

“MNEA empowers local associations to gain a powerful seat at the table for setting policy in their school districts,” says Scott Kiehl, MNEA organizing director. “Local associations that are recognized as exclusive representatives can bargain contracts that ensure students continue to have rich educational experiences, teachers are a meaningful part of curriculum decisions, and state test scores are not emphasized in teacher evaluations.”

## Influences on test scores

Teachers welcome accountability for helping students learn, but the U.S. Department of Education estimates 90 percent of the factors affecting student test scores are out of teachers’ control. Some factors are controlled by school districts, such as class size, length of the school year, quality of curriculum and materials, availability of student services such as school counselors and nurses, discipline policies, on-time transportation services and engaging extracurricular activities.

Low scores on standardized tests strongly correlate with poverty. Food insecurity, unstable housing, personal and family health issues, and family challenges affect the ability of students to focus on learning.

“I continue to notice the rise in students who suffer the effects of poverty, which include a concern for where they will sleep, which is greater than how they will prepare for exams,” says Jana Wilson, a Columbia MNEA member who teaches at-risk high school students. Wilson has helped many students achieve their goals but not without witnessing what student poverty can do to prevent student achievement and pose serious challenges to students as they try

to earn their high school diplomas. Issues associated with poverty, including teen pregnancy, transportation, nutrition, electricity, and shelter, all play a role in making poverty a leading influence in low achievement.

Lawmakers determine such factors as mandatory-attendance ages, funding for early childhood programs, and public education funding to provide the services and number of school days needed to meet the needs of their students.

“Do a web search for ‘test score correlations with poverty,’ and there is no shortage of documentation,” says Missouri NEA Legislative Director Otto Fajen. “Yet policy makers seem to have no appetite for addressing poverty. Real solutions are difficult and costly, while using standardized tests to label schools is easy and relatively cheap.”





# Testing's impact on teaching



Educators consistently express a strong sense of responsibility to provide for all students a quality education that will allow them to succeed in the world once they finish school, but many are concerned that the elevated role testing is now playing in schools is detrimental to success in meeting that responsibility.

“I believe the emphasis on testing has destroyed the very foundation of education in which many of us have previously been educated in,” says Riverview Gardens NEA member Theresa Beck, an elementary physical education teacher in the Riverview Gardens School District.

“As a result, classroom instruction has shifted from teaching a balanced curriculum, including reading, math, science and social studies, to an intense focus on communication arts and mathematics only. The focus of testing is creating a generation of students who are lacking fundamental knowledge in the areas of science

and social studies. Moving forward, the challenges are growing with the implementation of the new Common Core Standards and new standardized tests. As a result, all classroom instruction and assessment will be changing and evolving to meet the new instructional demands.”

Beck says even she sees the influence of testing in her instruction as a physical education teacher.

“The focus on testing has changed how I implement my curriculum and instruction on a daily basis,” Beck explains. “I have had to create lessons that balance the implementation of my curriculum content with the integration of both communication arts and mathematics core concepts. Too often, when it’s time for cuts, the specialty areas of physical education, music and art are the first areas considered. So in order to ensure job security, I have to design my physical education and health lessons to reinforce those core concepts that are taught in the regular classroom. Therefore, students are never given the opportunity to step away from the pressure of testing even in P.E. classes.”

One systemic flaw that Beck notes is that although testing’s purpose is to drive changes in classroom instruction to meet students’ needs, the time that testing requires is taking away much of that instructional time.

“Teachers should be given appropriate instruction time to teach the desired essential learning objectives,” she says. “Proper use of formative and summative testing can influence the depth of desired learning.”

## Evolution of the testing culture

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|--------------|--|-------------|--|
| <b>1917</b>  | <b>Introduction of Army Alpha and Beta aptitude quizzes</b>  | <b>1983</b> | <b>A Nation at Risk report</b> (calling for high-stakes testing in schools)  |
| <b>1920s</b> | <b>County School 8th Grade Exam</b> for those few Missouri students hoping to go to high school  | <b>1985</b> | <b>Missouri Mastery and Achievement Test (MMAT)</b><br>The 1985 Excellence in Education Act required this test for grades three, six, eight and 10 in English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies/civics.   |
| <b>1926</b>  | <b>Introduction of multiple-choice Scholastic Aptitude Test</b>  | <b>1992</b> | <b>First state-level NAEP results</b><br>About 3,000 students in the tested grade levels take this test every four years.  |
| <b>1936</b>  | <b>First automatic test scanner, IBM 805</b>   | <b>1993</b> | <b>Missouri Outstanding Schools Act</b><br>This legislation requires new statewide student assessments, the Missouri Assessment Program (MAP).<br><br>This legislation increased state funding for Missouri school districts in exchange for more accountability for student performance as measured by state grade-span tests in core subjects. From this act came the development of the MAP. Aggregate test scores became publicly available. |
| <b>1952</b>  | <b>Missouri requires driver’s license exam</b>   |             |  |
| <b>1959</b>  | <b>Introduction of ACT</b> (created to predict success of college freshmen)  |             |  |
| <b>1965</b>  | <b>First U.S. Elementary and Secondary Education Act</b><br><br>The federal act provides funds to improve education for low-income students and is renewed every five to seven years until No Child Left Behind in 2001. |             |  |
| <b>1969</b>  | <b>Introduction of National Assessment of Educational Progress</b> (NAEP selects students through scientifically determined samples in each state and reports national results.)   |             |  |
| <b>1979</b>  | <b>Missouri initiates statewide Basic Essential Skills Test (BEST)</b> for 8th graders (covering math, English language arts, social studies and science)  |             |  |



# MNEA's position on state testing

## Missouri NEA advocates for:

- broad accountability for all stakeholders
- local control
- meaningful involvement in decision making for educators
- measures that encourage whole-child development

Current school accountability measures focus on knowledge and skills that can be measured on a test. MNEA leaders are exploring options for other accountability systems that measure more than that and can be used in school accreditation.

Multiple measures of student learning in teacher evaluation allows projects that incorporate skills not easily tested and are integrated into instruction. Local

teachers and administrators work together to determine how to measure growth expectations in student learning.

## MNEA's top concerns with state testing

- Educators spend too much instructional time on standardized testing.
- The value of teacher-made tests, which provide the immediate feedback that teachers need to adjust instruction, seems to be lost.
- State policy makers should not begin using the new assessments for high-stakes decisions before students know how to take the new online state tests. Results could be reflective of computer skills rather than testing content.

MNEA leaders are exploring options for accountability systems that measure more than the knowledge and skills that standardized tests measure.



- 2001** **Missouri School Improvement Program (MSIP) 3**  
Although MSIP's beginnings were in 1987, round three took a new spin as it required school and district report cards that include overall test results. State officials use the MAP test as the major indicator in determining district accreditation.
- 2001** **U.S. Elementary and Secondary Education Act (No Child Left Behind)**  
NCLB required all students take state-mandated tests to assess school performance. This act requires testing third-grade through eighth-grade students annually in math and English language arts and high school students once in both subjects. In 2006, science tests were required once in elementary school, once in middle school and once in high school. The act requires math and reading NAEP tests every two years.
- 2006** **MSIP 4**  
The fourth cycle of MSIP focused solely on performance measures and gave no credit for process and resource standards.

- 2008-09** **Missouri high school end-of-course tests**  
(replacing tests covering multiple courses with course-specific tests)
- 2009** **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act**  
The ARRA funded two state consortia to develop better state assessments for students. Missouri became a leader in the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium, which is developing computer-adaptive tests.
- 2012** **MSIP 5**  
The fifth cycle of MSIP (2012) intensified the focus on student test scores, which are responsible for a strong majority of the points possible. Standardized test results are now the only definition of student achievement.
- 2013-14** **Final year for old MAP**  
Missouri pilots Smarter Balance Assessment.
- 2014-15** **New MAP**  
Smarter Balance Assessment becomes math and English language arts section of the MAP in grades 3-8 (based on Common Core State Standards).

# New 2015 Missouri Assessment Plan

Missouri NEA provided leadership in developing a plan with all education stakeholders. The Missouri State Board of Education approved a new state assessment plan that increases instructional time by reducing the time children spend taking state tests and by increasing the use of teacher-made tests to provide immediate feedback.

“The new Missouri Assessment Plan happened because of the work of Missouri NEA and the two principal associations,” says Roger Kurtz, executive director of the Missouri Association of School Administrators.

The new plan meets federal accountability requirements, maintains the ability to produce growth scores for state accountability, and allows comparisons of Missouri student performance with other states. The plan provides unlimited access to grades three through eight math and English language arts interim benchmark assessments, formative assessment resources and a digital library at no cost to local districts beginning in the 2014-2015 school year. In high school, the state will pay for every 11th grade student to take the ACT.

## MAP changes for the 2014-2015 school year

### Grades three through eight MAP

Grades five and eight take both the math and English language arts Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium tests (about 7.5 hours of testing). These tests are not grade-span tests. Rather, they cover the expectations for a specific grade level.

Because these tests are used throughout the U.S., Missouri will be able to measure its students against those in other states. Grades five and eight also take a state science test. To meet federal requirements, grades three, four, six and seven will take a one-hour, computer-adaptive survey test covering math and English language arts. Districts will be able to earn growth points on MSIP through these tests. All tests are online, and results will be available in 10 business days. This new plan cuts time spent in state-required tests by more than half in comparison to the original plan for 2015, prior to MNEA’s advocacy efforts.

### High school MAP

The high school plan limits required end-of-course tests to English II, American government, biology, and algebra I (algebra II for students taking algebra I in eighth grade). These tests will be part of the student achievement points for the Missouri School Improvement Plan. Scores will be available in five business days. Other existing end-of-course tests may be available for voluntary use by districts.

The state will pay for juniors in high school to take the ACT with writing. This policy meets the federal

requirement to be able to compare student achievement with other states. Every Missouri high school will administer the ACT on the same school day in March or April, with a make-up day 10 business days later. Students may take the ACT as many times as they wish, but the state only pays for this one test administration. ACT scores will continue as part of the College and Career Readiness points in the current MSIP point system.

High school teachers’ efforts to align their curriculum with the Common Core State Standards will help their students do well on the ACT.

“ACT was at the table when the Common Core State Standards were developed, and the Standards were informed by the ACT College Readiness Standards and our decades of student performance data,” says Paul Weeks, ACT vice president for customer engagement. “Consequently, the ACT is well aligned with the Common Core. That said, we are aware of some gaps in alignment and have plans to address them. Any changes to ACT will be made thoughtfully and gradually to protect the integrity of the 1-36 score scale and our validated College Readiness Benchmark scores, which so many users understand and value.”

Missouri NEA facilitated meetings with other education groups and the Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education to develop this plan. Groups in the coalition included the Missouri Association of School Administrators (superintendents), the Missouri Association of Secondary School Principals, the Missouri Association of Elementary School Principals, the American Federation of Teachers-Missouri, the Missouri State Teachers Association and the Missouri School Boards’ Association.



# Testing vs. learning

Educators know that standardized assessments do not measure all aspects of student learning. Life skills, such as getting along with others, how to work in teams, social and emotional development, public speaking, artistic and athletic skill building, and perseverance in solving problems are just a few educational outcomes that standardized tests don't measure.

"The tests are set up to measure the minimums each student is expected to learn," explains Missouri NEA Teaching and Learning Director Ann Jarrett. "They do not tell us anything about students who excel and little about students who are far below grade level. Test developers aim for the new, computer adaptive tests to improve measures of both high and low performing students, but we have to wait and see if it works."



## Computer adaptive testing

Computer adaptive tests adjust their level of difficulty for each student. Software matches questions to the knowledge of the test taker based on the answer to the previous question. When the student selects a wrong answer, the next question is easier. When the student selects the correct answer, the next question is more difficult.

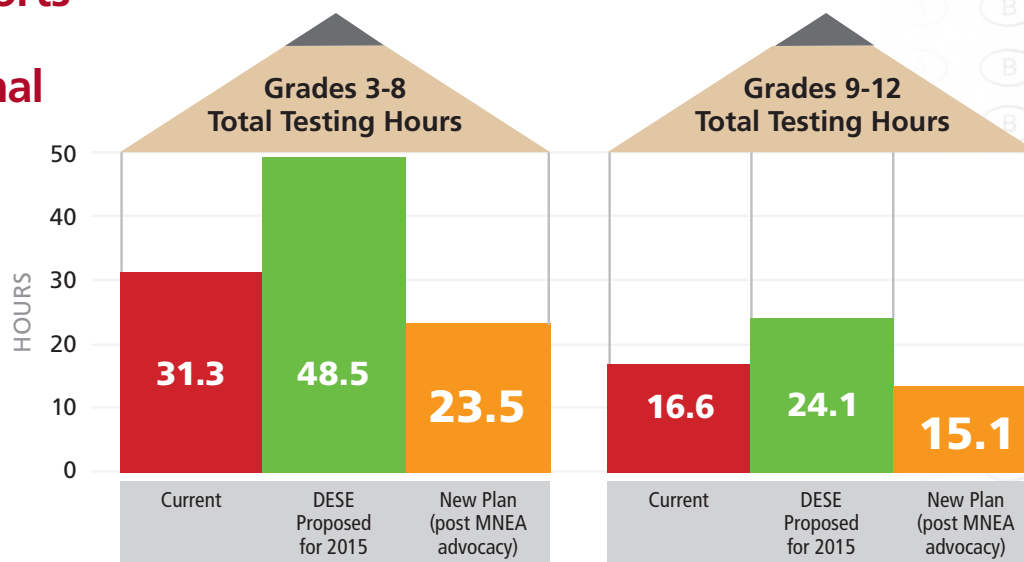
Computer adaptive tests result in shorter test times for students and more precise data on student knowledge. No student should expect to get more than half of the questions correct because each correct answer brings a more difficult question. However, scores are not a percent of correct answers. Questions are weighted by level of difficulty to reach a score.

"Although computers can now score open-ended questions and essays cheaper and more quickly than human scoring, teachers are concerned that such scoring may be overly simplistic and may not accurately reflect student knowledge and skills," says Monica Miller, a third-grade teacher in Columbia. Her school is piloting the testing software. "We are also concerned about software glitches and student familiarity with the technology having an impact on scores."

Not every Missouri school has sufficient technology resources to administer online tests without a significant disruption to school schedules, and no additional federal or state funds are available to help schools upgrade digital technology.

"The new assessment plan, which cuts overall time spent testing nearly in half, will help ease congestion and test schedules," Jarrett says. "The most serious concern about computer adaptive testing is the degree to which low income students with limited access to digital technology are disadvantaged compared to students with extensive access to digital technology at school and at home. All current tests show a strong correlation between test score and poverty. New computer-based tests could result in larger gaps between test scores of different socioeconomic groups. MNEA will be pushing for independent studies to determine whether computerized testing is a reliable option for Missouri schools."

## MNEA efforts recover instructional time



## Learn more

Learn more about how poverty affects achievement and the reliability of testing as an accurate method of evaluating achievement through the following reading list:

### **Parental Income Linked to Students' Standardized Test Results**

Maria Ortega, Washington State University News Service

### **How Poverty Impacts Students' Test Scores, In Four Graphs**

Huffington Post, Nov. 19, 2013

### **Stanford Study Finds Widening Gap Between Rich and Poor Students**

Brooke Donald, Stanford Report, Feb. 13, 2012

### **Test Scores, Poverty and Ethnicity: The New American Dilemma**

Donald C. Orlich and Glenn Gifford, Washington State University,  
October 2006

### **A New Majority: Low Income Students in the South and the Nation**

Southern Education Foundation, October 2013

### **The Test Chinese Schools Still Fail**

Jiang Xueqin, The Wall Street Journal, Dec. 8, 2010

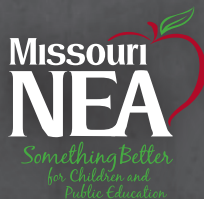
### **What's Wrong with Standardized Tests?**

FairTest, May 22, 2012

### **Reliability and Validity of Inferences About Teachers Based on Student Test Scores**

Edward H. Haertel, Educational Testing Service, March 22, 2013

**For links to resources, visit [www.mnea.org/testing](http://www.mnea.org/testing).**



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