



WEEKLY REPORT

State Senator Gary Nodler
District 32



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Improvements on the MAP

JEFFERSON CITY – Until last year, Missouri’s standards for student performance were among the highest in the nation, and once the federal government set into motion the No Child Left Behind act, those high standards became barriers to education rather than beneficial gauges of academic progress.

The No Child Left Behind act placed new accountability measures on states by requiring that all students be tested annually, but how to test the students and by which standards are left up to the states to decide. The act further mandates that all students meet the standards within 10 years and that all schools pass benchmarks along the way. Since 1997 student performance has been graded according to the Missouri Assessment Program, or MAP test, which defines “proficiency” as being capable to achieve above the students’ grade level. Missouri’s choice to continue using the MAP test to assess student performance became unreasonable when, in 2003, nearly half of Missouri school districts failed to make the grade according to the federal requirement of showing “adequate yearly progress.”

The MAP test was essentially setting students up to fall short, which would eventually result in costly penalties imposed on school districts. I sponsored a bill last year to improve the MAP tests. This legislation, which was signed into law last summer, requires that by June 30, 2006, the State Board of Education align Missouri standards with those of the federal government so that our students are not unfairly compared to students in other states with lower standards.

The original MAP made it difficult to validate our progress because our standards were isolated from the national standards. Because Missouri cannot ignore the federal law, our only option if we want to consider the best interest of our students and our schools, was to modify our own performance evaluations so that the federal law is not an obstacle in the learning process.

The Missouri Department of Elementary and Secondary Education and Missouri teachers have been working to develop new grade-level tests in math and communication arts. This past May, more

than 220,000 students from 476 school districts participated in a voluntary field test of the new assessment. State educators, community representatives and parents will be getting together in early December to set achievement levels at a conference. The standards will be parallel to the four achievement levels of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP): Advanced, Proficient, Basic and Below Basic. Each content area of math and communication arts will be explored by 56 panelists consisting of teachers, educators and non-educators. The panelists will make their recommendations to the State Board of Education for approval next spring.

Those who are involved in the process of restructuring Missouri's assessment program have expressed their confidence in last year's successful legislation and this year's efforts from panelists. We are on our way to aligning the academic-performance standards between our state and federal levels and establishing a more fair evaluation system that does not punish Missouri schools and students for having standards that exceed those of the federal government.

I will keep you updated on this issue as it progresses.

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*Senator Gary Nodler represents the people of Newton, Jasper
and Dade counties in the Missouri Senate.*