

Ka Lau

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Standardized Tests: The Answers

Had you strolled along LCPCS corridors in the last few weeks, you'd have seen roomfuls of students taking tests... standardized tests. What *are* these tests, and why do the students take them?

Basically, there are two sets of standardized tests LCPCS students take every year. First, there are the MAP tests (MAP stands for "Measures of Academic Progress"). These tests are not mandated by any state or federal law. Instead, they have been carefully selected by LCPCS staff to help them assess student progress. Results from the MAP tests are immediate, and very detailed. Teachers and staff can evaluate trends, or see where individual students need additional help. "The MAP tests are the chief thing we do to evaluate how effective the teaching processes are," said Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment for secondary grades Scott Smith. Lexile scores, which measure reading level, are generated from the MAP tests.



First grader Kingsteine Dela Cruz shows the right spirit, and to the left, Ian Caldwell prepares to knuckle down just prior to SBAC testing last week.

This year, elementary grades took MAP tests three times, and secondary students took MAP tests twice. This schedule is determined by the school. "Every day spent taking a test is a day not spent in the classroom," said Mr. Smith, so the staff work very hard to ensure they have just the information they need to make sure every student is meeting expectations. All LCPCS students take MAP tests.

The second set of tests is the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium tests, or SBAC. These are the ones now mandated by the State of Hawai'i (they replaced the HSA tests last year). These tests are given at the beginning and end of each school year to grades 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 and 11, and contain both multiple choice and essay questions. They are graded by a consortium of Hawai'i educators who specialize in testing assessments. This process takes awhile, and results from tests taken at the end of a given year are not returned to the school (and parents) until the beginning of the next school year.

Why do test scores matter? Here's one reason. Most parents have heard the phrase "Title 1," but may not be clear on what it means. "Title 1 schools" are those in which at least 40 percent of the students are from low income families. Lots of Title 1 funding is made available to Title 1 schools that do not meet their State mandates. (There are also Title 2, Title 3, Title 4 etc. monies, which come earmarked for specific purposes, like professional training.) Generally speaking, as schools perform better, Title 1 funding drops. You read that right. Improving scores put the Title 1 money in jeopardy!

Standardized Tests, cont.

This happened to LCPCS this year. Test scores for the 2014/2015 school year showed so much improvement that when the test results came back last fall, it appeared that LCPCS might not be eligible for Title 1 funds in the 2016/2017 school year. (Because of the lag time between tests and results, scores in any given year affect funding a year and a half down the road.) However, our administration worked very hard to put together a strong case that Title 1 funds were needed, and the school *will* be receiving Title 1 money next year. This is important, because Title 1 funds for LCPCS have, in some years, been as much as \$200,000.

This inverse relationship between scores and funding doesn't mean that students shouldn't do their best on the tests! For one thing, SBAC scores will follow the students throughout their careers, and show up on final transcripts. Yep! Scores from grades 3 through 8 and 11 are a permanent part of a student's record. Second, the Hawai'i Charter School Commission uses SBAC scores, in conjunction with other measures, to determine whether or not LCPCS can continue to operate as a charter school. They need to see continuously improving scores. Third, better scores mean the kids are learning what they need to succeed in today's world. Schools with good scores attract more and more students, and per pupil funding then increases, to the benefit of all.



Student Records Coordinator and test administrator Paula Dickey said recently, "The most important thing I see is the attitude, and that comes from the parents, from home." Kids who know the tests are important work hard and do well. Students who don't understand the tests' importance work through them quickly, and score low. Students in special education, Ms. Dickey pointed out, "can do as well as anyone else." Their special needs are met in the testing environment. But students who are absent on test days bring down the scores for the entire school. In a school the size of LCPCS, just a few missing kids can make a huge difference in overall scores.

Both Ms. Dickey and Mr. Smith are encouraged by recent MAP and SBAC scores at LCPCS. In addition to bringing up scores, said Mr. Smith, another goal is to get the students into the discussion about tests and scores. Mr. Smith agreed with Ms. Dickey that parents are a key part of helping kids have the right attitude. He says that LCPCS didn't do a good job of letting parents know when testing was taking place this year, and that will change. School staff will be working hard next year to help both the students and their parents better understand the tests and take ownership in the results.

Josie Harding: LCPCS Teacher of the Year



Anyone who has had a child in LCPCS's third grade will not be surprised to learn that Josie Harding was recently selected as our school's Teacher of the Year. The HSTA teachers' union annually sponsors this award to celebrate the outstanding work of Hawai'i's Public School teachers, although this is the first year that LCPCS has participated. Ms. Harding was nominated and selected by LCPCS teachers and staff, and attended an award luncheon at Nani Mau Gardens. "Josie is noted for her attention to lesson planning, her ability to meet each child at [his or her] academic and social level, maintain high expectations for all, and celebrate accomplishments," said Director of Curriculum, Instruction and Assessment for elementary grades Liana Honda. Congratulations, Ms. Harding, on your much-deserved recognition.