

From: Mark Femrite [FEMRITEM@westonka.k12.mn.us]
Subject: Re: MACL October 2008 Meeting Notes

MACL Group,

Do any of you have good ideas/strategies on how to engage and motivate students to do their best on the Grade 5, 8 and HS MCA-II Science tests?

Any particular resources you are using outside of the MDE item samplers/assessments you are using?

Two responses below:

WATERTOWN

Currently I am using the Daily Science program by Grow Publications as my test preparation throughout the school year. I am using the 4th grade program throughout the year, and the 5th grade program as test prep prior to the test week. This program helps students get a general overview of science, rather than just the 5th grade standards. This is important since the MCA II covers standards from multiple years.

To see how students might perform on the MCA II test questions, people could simply align their assessments to Bloom's Taxonomy, which is what we are told is the testing format. The higher the level a student can respond the higher the score. Helping students answer these types of questions would be a benefit to students.

I'm also using the sample test questions from the state to prepare for the Science MCA II's.

We do not have any other test preparation materials.

Donna Steuernagel

WOODBURY HIGH SCHOOL

All biology staff in District 833 were involved in a half-day training session hosted by Dawn Cameron and Jim Wood of MDE. The session involved principles and strategies for including scenario-based assessments in the classroom. As a part of the training, teachers were asked to and given time to write a scenario that fit with curriculum currently used. Scenarios were shared among the group and discussion ensued regarding implementation into classrooms.

District 833 is currently redesigning curriculum frameworks incorporating principles of backward design. As a part of this effort, our biology staff is working to "unpack standards" and produce a set of scenario-based assessment items that will be used for common assessment among our soon to be three high schools.

The outcomes of this effort include horizontal alignment among teachers, standards alignment, exposure to scenario-based assessment for our students, teaching strategies and assessment tools that are focused on connections in biology verses isolated concepts; all working toward improvements in both the teaching and learning of biology for our students. If follow-through is consistent among staff, this should translate into increased proficiency on standardized assessment.

My personal opinion on strategies for student engagement:

The context in which the assessment is given is for many students self-motivating. Feedback from my students was that even though some thought the test was difficult, they still had fun taking it because it was on the computer. "Teacher talk" about standardized assessment is also crucial. If students hear from teachers that a particular test isn't important or that it is a bad test, some students will underperform. Coaching students in test specific vocabulary, expectation for answers to constructed response items and

letting students know what to expect when they sit down to take the test are also strategies that can be used to decrease the amount of test anxiety some students struggle with.

Wendy Niesl; K-12 Science Specialist, South Washington County Schools; Biology and Chemistry instructor Woodbury High School