

October 23, 2006

Dear Peirce Families,

On Friday, October 20, 8:30-9:15, I held a Coffee on the topic of “How to Handle Your Child’s MCAS Scores”. For those who were unable to attend, here is a synopsis of this conversation.

- The state will release student scores to families next week. The Newton Public Schools expects to mail this information directly to you for receipt sometime Oct. 23 - 26.
- The teachers and I have begun to analyze the results to identify patterns and trends in student performance in order to identify if and where we need to make instructional or programmatic changes.
- District and individual school performances were released to the public this past week. Scores in ELA have dipped across Newton, including at Peirce. We noticed that our overall % dropped with fewer students in the Advanced Range. Our analysis will be important as we want to be sure we make instructional and programmatic adjustments in order to move more students in to the Proficient and Advanced ranges. Our last year’s 5th graders performed well in Science & Technology. We continue to perform well above the state average in all areas. Our 2006 AYP report can be viewed at: <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/ayp2006/report.asp?school=207100>
- When our data analysis is more complete, we will share any action steps we develop at another Coffee later this Fall.
- In the meantime, as a frame of reference for parents regarding their child, know that proficiency on these tests suggests real reading and writing strengths; the opposite is not necessarily true, as there are numerous ways for an eight- or nine-year-old to go awry on these lengthy and challenging tests. Hence, it is important to remember to balance results from MCAS with other sources of information such as classroom performance, and data from formal and informal assessments. Together, all of these indicators inform classroom instruction and provide a real picture of your child’s strengths and areas for growth.

Should I talk with my child about his/her scores?

- The faculty and I believe that you should NOT share the scores with your child. Instead, let your child know that you believe s/he worked hard and did his/her best and that the test results show that. The score is not useful information to a child. The last thing we want is for children to be sharing/comparing scores or to view a score as a reflection of their learning potential. This is one test in a short time period. Usually MCAS performance mirrors performance on other measures including classwork. Occasionally, the performance does not match and we look carefully at these situations to try to understand what contributed to unanticipated performance.
- When we prepare students for the MCAS, we share that the test assesses the curriculum not the child and that we believe they are ready for the assessment. We do provide children with test-taking skills, helping students understand how to: read the questions, identify key words, respond completely, etc. These are useful skills in any academic situation. It is interesting to look at the released test questions and how your child responded. By looking at the test questions, we can explore how or why students responded as they did.
- Parents can access the test questions at the DOE website: www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/
- Our 2006 AYP report can be viewed at <http://profiles.doe.mass.edu/ayp2006/report.asp?school=207100>
- If you have questions about your child’s performance, please talk with your child’s teacher or with me.
- We have posted an article on the PTO website: “How to Handle MCAS Scores” written by Barbara Meltz from the Boston Globe. It is a useful reference as you think about your child and MCAS performance.

My best,

Eva Thompson