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## **'It's Important ... But Not for Me': Research Indicates Kansas and Missouri Students and Parents Get the Importance of Math, Science and Technology Education Generally, But Not for Themselves**

There is growing consensus among the nation's business, government and higher education leaders that unless schools do more to train and nurture a whole new generation of young Americans with strong skills in math, science and technology, U.S. leadership in the world economy is at risk. A new research report from the opinion research and citizen engagement organization Public Agenda concludes that Kansas and Missouri parents and students didn't get the memo.

"Important, But Not for Me: Parents and Students in Kansas and Missouri Talk About Math, Science and Technology Education" details parents' and students' current thinking about MST education and their satisfaction with the existing curriculum which most experts see as vastly below world-class standards. According to the study, just 25 percent of Kansas/Missouri parents think their children should be

studying more math and science; 70 percent think things "are fine as they are now." The report also explains why parents and students are so complacent in this area and what kinds of changes might be helpful in building more interest in and support for more rigorous MST courses.

"A crucial part of our ten year initiative to improve MST throughout the Kansas City area is to better understand how parents and students view MST careers, the importance of these subjects in their lives, and the value they place on these subjects in the school curriculum," said Dennis Cheek, Vice President of Education at the Ewing Marion Kauffman Foundation. "This study resoundingly confirmed what was observed in an earlier Public Agenda national study - parents and students have not received a clear message about the importance of MST to life, learning, and earning in this new millennium despite a multitude of national reports and pronouncements by national policy makers. The challenge ahead of us is to more fully inform and engage parents and students as full partners in educational reform."

"Important, But Not for Me" shows that parents and students are aware of the United States' slippage in international standings on MST education and recognize that students who complete advanced courses in MST education have good employment prospects and can expect a successful future. But the report also describes a disconnect between this understanding and their own personal interests and expectations.

"Students would not be motivated to take MST courses by abstract notions of international competitiveness, but could be convinced take higher level classes if they believed they were essential for the career and college opportunities to which they aspire," said Jean Johnson, Executive Vice President of Public Agenda and Director of Education Insights.

The full report along with the complete questionnaire and topline data are available online at: <http://www.publicagenda.org/ImportantButNotforMe>

The findings are based on twelve focus groups with parents, teachers and students in the Kansas City region, fifteen expert interviews with local business, education and community leaders and telephone interviews with a random sample of 1,472 parents of children grade 6-12 in public school in Kansas and Missouri and 1,295 public school students in grades 6 through 12.

What Parents and Kids Say

While 86 percent of parents agree that "students with advanced math and science skills will have a big advantage when it comes to work and college opportunities" and 63 percent of students say "it's crucial for most of today's students to learn higher-level math skills like advanced algebra and calculus," when it comes to ordering their personal priorities, MST education loses out.

While 92 percent of parents and 83 percent of students say it is "absolutely essential" (as opposed to "important but not essential") that students learn basic reading and writing and 91 percent of parents and 79 percent of students think having basic math skills is "absolutely essential," only 23 percent of parents and 26 percent of students believe it is essential to understand higher level math like calculus and only 23 percent of parents and 24 percent of students say it is essential to understand advanced sciences like physics.

On a positive note, the report notes that algebra is fairing well as a priority. The subject has been given significantly more national attention by leaders in recent years who have argued that it is a critically important subject for all students to master, and the Public Agenda research suggests that this emphasis is paying off. Nearly 8 in 10 parents (79 percent) and 7 in 10 (70 percent) students say algebra is absolutely essential. This suggests that parents and students may be open to arguments about the importance of advanced MST mastery for today's students

"In fact, this is something we saw quite clearly in focus groups for this project," said Jean Johnson. "As people learned more about the expanding role of math, science and technology in the new economy, the more importance they attached to students mastering these subjects."

#### Satisfaction with Teachers, Curriculum

Both parents and students are satisfied with their schools' MST teachers and curriculum. Parents say that courses are harder than when they were in school (69 percent say math courses are harder and 51 percent say science courses are harder). This, the report contends, has led to complacency among parents and students. When it comes to whether their child's school should be teaching more math and science, 70 percent say "things are fine as is."

Asked whether all students should be expected to take advanced science classes such as physics and advanced chemistry, 72 percent of students said no, "It should be expected only of students who are interested." Like their parents, students give MST teachers high marks. More than 7 in 10 say that their teachers are helping them

"learn a lot" about these subjects. And only 20 percent say that low student achievement can be attributed to not having enough good math and science teachers.

### In Need of Convincing

Some good news from the research: kids do not buy into the stereotypes that MST achievement depends on natural ability or that students who do well in these subjects are less popular or socially awkward. Seventy percent of students disagree with the statement that "students who are strong in math and science tend to be less popular." An even larger majority (85 percent) hold that math and science are subjects that "kids can learn in school and develop with experience" rather than being "something kids are mostly born with." So, if kids believe they could do it, what would convince them to do it?

Three-quarters of students (76 percent) say that math and science are irrelevant to their lives. But when such courses are required for college, it seems to make the difference. In the survey, parents and students both said they would be most motivated by arguments that relate to future opportunities for young people in higher education or in the job market. Sixty-three percent of students say advanced math is crucial for success in college and work. Additionally, the focus group portion of the research indicated very low levels of understanding among students of just what sorts of careers involved knowledge of math, science and technology. Together this suggests that families would likely put more emphasis on advanced MST education in high school if universities and trade schools mandated MST prerequisites for a greater number of incoming students whose intended majors necessitate such knowledge.

More abstract arguments for students taking higher level MST courses are not likely to work, the report concludes. While policy leaders often invoke dire warnings about regional and national competitiveness, the research found that parents and students are less moved by this argument than they are by the idea that a strong MST background might give a leg up on college applications.

Quoted in the report, one typical student said, "I hate math because it's hard for me to understand how that's ever going to come back and help me. There's just not a point." Another said, "Science doesn't matter unless you want to become a doctor or something like that." The majority of students continue to see advanced MST education as irrelevant to their career aspirations, and few recognize just how many

"new economy" jobs require advanced math, science and technology comprehension.

Full report:

[http://www.publicagenda.org/importantbutnotforme/pdfs/important\\_but\\_not\\_for\\_me.pdf](http://www.publicagenda.org/importantbutnotforme/pdfs/important_but_not_for_me.pdf)

## **Missouri's SAT Scores Improve; Popularity of "AP" Classes Is Still Growing Rapidly**

Countering the national trend, Missouri students posted higher scores this year on the SAT college-entry exam. They also continued to sign up for Advanced Placement (AP) courses in record numbers, state education officials announced this week.

State and national statistics for the 2006-2007 SAT results and Advanced Placement program were released August 28 by The College Board (<http://www.collegeboard.com/splash/>).

Nationally, the composite average SAT score dropped by 4 points – one point on the math subtest and three points on the critical reading subtest.

Missouri students, on the other hand, posted an overall gain of 10 points, with totals of 594 (up 7 points) in mathematics and 594 (up 3 points) in critical reading. The maximum possible score is 800 on each of the subtests.

Missouri students typically score 80 to 90 points higher than the national average on the math and reading subtests of the SAT.

The number of high school graduates taking the SAT in Missouri dropped by about 500 (almost 13%) to 3,720. By comparison, more than 45,000 high school students took the ACT exam last year.

### **Some AP Courses Now Available Online**

Although fewer students took the SAT last year, the number of Missouri students signing up for Advanced Placement classes increased significantly, rising to almost

12,750 – an increase of nearly 11% over last year.

AP courses also are sponsored by The College Board. Students across the nation may take the same exam at the end of their AP courses and may qualify for advanced college credit, based on their scores.

The number of students taking AP classes in Missouri high schools has increased rapidly in recent years – more than doubling since 1999-2000.

AP courses will be more accessible to Missouri students this year through the state's new "virtual school" program and could help fuel the growth in AP participation. Students now have online access to nine Advanced Placement courses through the Missouri Virtual Instruction Program (MoVIP), which began operating earlier this month.

According to preliminary figures from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, students have already registered nearly 350 times to take AP courses this semester.

The College Board has announced SAT® scores for the class of 2007, the largest and most diverse class of SAT takers on record. Nearly 1.5 million students (1,494,531) in the class of 2007 took the SAT, and minority students comprised nearly four out of 10 test-takers.

The College Board, in partnership with National Student Clearinghouse, is now able to track college-enrollment patterns of SAT takers at the state and national level.

Available for the first time this year is the percentage of 2006 college-bound seniors from public schools enrolled in college and the percentage that chose to enroll in-state or out-of-state. Information on enrollment by race/ethnicity and type of institution attended (two year, four year, public, private) is also available. The College Board will be able to follow each class of SAT takers so that in future years, additional information, including the percentage of students successfully completing each year of college, as well as graduation rates, will be available.

Two separate reports are available.

**To see Missouri reports:**

**[http://www.collegeboard.com/prod\\_downloads/about/news\\_info/cbsenior/yr2007/attendance/MO.pdf](http://www.collegeboard.com/prod_downloads/about/news_info/cbsenior/yr2007/attendance/MO.pdf)**

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## **Junior High Teacher in Liberty Is Missouri Teacher of the Year for 2007-08**

*Social Studies Teacher's Activities Teach More than Dates and Facts, Students Are "Exploring the Dynamic Narrative of Our Nation"*

Social studies teacher Eric Langhorst uses high-tech tools to teach students about the past. In his American history class, he incorporates 21st-century technology to make learning meaningful and exciting for his students.

The eighth-grade teacher at South Valley Junior High School in the Liberty School District is Missouri's Teacher of the Year (<http://dese.mo.gov/commissioner/awards/TOY/index.html>) for 2007-08, state education officials announced today.

Mr. Langhorst strives to make the classroom experience fresh and exciting and uses cutting-edge technology to actively engage his students. His students participate in live debates, play computer simulations of presidential elections and invite local elected officials as guest speakers.

"Technology has become a tool that I utilize in my classroom to bring the outside world to my students and allow my students to share their experiences with a global community," Mr. Langhorst said.

"The focus for today's student has shifted from the art of obtaining information to the art of evaluating and applying the information they receive." For example, when students study the presidential election of 1860, they are assigned a project of creating a 30-second television ad for Abraham Lincoln to help him win the presidency. Students work as Abraham Lincoln's campaign staff and apply the

information they are learning through this modern-day problem-solving experience.

In a letter of recommendation for the award, Kimberly Gilmore, director of history for The History Channel/A&E Television Networks in New York, described Mr. Langhorst as an "invigorating" teacher whose innovative practices provide a stellar example for not only his students but for other teachers. "Through dynamic lectures, podcasts and special activities, Mr. Langhorst regards his students as historians in their own right. Their acceptance of his challenges to interpret, think about and care about history shines through in the projects he pursues."

A nine-member selection committee appointed by the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education interviewed six state-level finalists Aug. 29 to select the new Teacher of the Year. Mr. Langhorst automatically becomes Missouri's candidate for the 2008 National Teacher of the Year award.

Mr. Langhorst is beginning his 14th year in the profession. He has been in his current position at South Valley Junior High School for six years.

His teaching follows two basic principles: engaging the students in the story of American history and modeling a lifestyle that includes the practice of life-long learning.

"I truly love the amazing story that I am able to unravel for my students each year – American history. My curriculum is filled with heroes, villains, tragedy, triumph and questions. My job is to bring these stories to life. Teaching this curriculum is not about me telling the students what they need to know. Teaching history for me is about bringing my students along with me as I continue my journey on exploring the dynamic narrative of our nation."

"The most meaningful rewards I receive from teaching are the unexpected positive comments from students and parents. I feel as if I am making a difference when a parent tells me their child came home and engaged the family in a discussion about a topic we covered in class. Ultimately, my greatest reward is a hope that somewhere down the road my students will visit a museum or a historical site with their children and pass down a love for history that may have started in my class."

### **Community Involvement**

Mr. Langhorst is the social studies department chairperson for his school. He serves on the district's technology team and recently was a mentor for a first-year teacher in the district. He was head eighth-grade boys' basketball coach from 2001-2007.

He is an adjunct faculty member at Park University, Parkville, teaching graduate courses in instructional technology. He serves on the Clay County Historical Society Board of Directors.

In 2005, he created a blog and podcast, "Speaking of History." Teachers from across the nation and the world visit the Web site to discuss topics relating to education, history and technology.

He has won numerous awards, including the 2006 Cable's Leader in Learning Award from the national cable TV industry. He was a finalist for the 2007 Daughters of the American Revolution National History Teacher of the Year and was selected to the 2006 National School Boards' Association's "20 to Watch List" for educational technology leadership over the next 20 years.

His articles have been published in several publications, including *Educational Leadership* magazine, *Discovery Education Resource Guide* and *School Library Journal* magazine.

Mr. Langhorst was raised in Howells, Neb., a rural community in east-central Nebraska. Before joining the Liberty School District in 2001, he taught in Nebraska as a junior high and high school history teacher in Newman Grove and Roseland. He earned a bachelor's degree from the University of Nebraska at Kearney and a master's degree in curriculum and instruction with an emphasis on instructional technology from the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.

South Valley Junior High School Principal Brad Armstrong said, "Mr. Langhorst puts forth a great deal of time and effort working with students outside the classroom on various events and projects. His students volunteer at the Clay County Museum and facilitate Liberty Historical and Architectural Heritage walking tours. Mr. Langhorst has a unique passion for his content and his profession, and it shows each day, both inside and outside his classroom."

The State Board of Education will honor Mr. Langhorst and the five finalists in the Teacher of the Year program at a banquet Nov. 13 in Jefferson City. Each teacher will receive cash awards and other prizes.