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LITERACY1107

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Teachers work to address literacy problems in mid-Missouri

ANCHOR INTRO

The Missouri Assessment Program, otherwise known as the MAP test, is a state-wide standardized test for third through eighth grade that measures reading proficiency. But the test is being questioned as a valid way to measure student success. KBIA's Gaby Morera Di Núbila (dee-NOO-bee-la) tells how the test determines literacy rates and why experts and teachers are calling it a problem.

LITERACY1107

TRT: 4:25

SOC: "firsthand."

More than half of all Missouri third graders aren't meeting grade level reading standards according to 2019 data from the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, or DESE.

Morgan Buscher works with at-risk youth and sees the problem of low literacy rates every day.

NAT SOUND: Children chatting at an after-school program

BUSCHER1

TRT: 0:21

OC: "a little bit behind."

"It's obviously a problem in Columbia Public Schools. We have a student in the teen center who - she's in sixth grade, and they read at a second grade level. And they're just now starting chapter books. And so, they're 100%, intelligent 100% capable of doing it. It's just, they're a little bit behind."

NAT SOUND: Children chatting at an after-school program, chairs scraping and locker closing

Buscher works with middle and high school students who are falling behind, as the Teen Center Coordinator of Moving Ahead, a free after-school and summer program for at-

risk youth in Columbia. She says low literacy can negatively impact students beyond elementary school.

Francisco Palermo, a human development professor at the University of Missouri, says learning to read early is a building block for a child's future success.

PALERMO1

TRT :10

OC: "drop out of school."

"Kids who are struggling to read in third grade, fourth grade and continue to struggle to read are the ones who are most likely to eventually drop out of school."

And the data makes it look like a lot of third graders are struggling. According to MAP test scores, 56% of Columbia third graders failed to reach proficiency in 2019.

Although literacy is considered a marker of success, some question the validity of how this success is measured.

PALERMO2

TRT :25

OC: "below grade level."

"This is a problem with all standardized tests, because there's always a question of who the average kids are. I said it earlier that children from low income homes, oftentimes exhibit literacy learning difficulties. Well, if those children are not part of the average, then it might seem like the low-income children are below grade level."

Even though these tests might not be the best measure of student success, Angie Zapata, a University of Missouri elementary education professor, says that they're not going anywhere.

ZAPATA1

TRT :12

OC: "for the MAP Test"

"The system will always need these big data sets, it's just the way the state works, districts work

to begin to gauge and get a sense of what's the state of literacy among children.”

The MAP test is administered once - at the end of the school year, but Zapata says that some teachers don't find the data that comes from it useful.

ZAPATA2

TRT :11

OC: "write with them every day."

“They said ‘I don't need, I don't need this test, to know what my students know, I, I work with them every day, I read and write with them every day.’”

Casey Echelmeier, a literacy teacher in the Mexico school district, is one of these teachers. Every time she listens to students read out loud or answer questions about a text, she takes notes and uses that information to meet them at their level.

ECHELMEIER1

TRT :18

OC: "for those students."

“Over the course of a year, with the benchmark testing and the progress monitoring and the interventions that happened and the strategies and the skills that were conquered in the classroom. That, to me, was more of a reflection of how I did as a classroom teacher for those students that year.”

Echelmeier has been a teacher for over 15 years. She says the MAP test doesn't tell a student's full story.

ECHELMEIER2

TRT :20

OC: "not going to be successful."

“So, if I have a student that isn't working on grade level that's working below grade level, they're probably not going to perform as well. You don't know the backstory of that kiddo. What

if that kiddo came to a fourth-grade classroom reading on a first-grade level, and now they're at a third-grade level? Well, that's a huge jump. But if they're taking a fourth-grade MAP test, they're not going to be successful."

That jump is ignored when tests only measure success based on grade level standards. But for Echelmeier, the growth in itself is a success — even if a student is not at grade level yet.

EHELMEIER3

TRT :09

OC: "not going to be successful."

"In a realistic world, we'd like 100% of our students to be reading at, at or above grade level. That's our goal. Our goal is to get 100% students there."

Although that's Echelmeier's goal, districts like Mexico have over 50% of its students not reaching state standards. But, these standards and how they're assessed are being questioned as valid measurements of student success. In the meantime, Echelmeier and Buscher are working to get students ready for these standardized tests and help them reach state goals.

STANDARD OUTCUE (SOC):

"With producers Katharine Finnerty and Grace Vance, Gaby Morera Di Núbila, KBIA News. "

ANCHOR TAG

As we get closer to state testing, teachers and after school programs are working to bridge the gap between what students know and what will be measured on the test. To read more about what solutions experts are offering, go to our website KBIA.org.