

## “The Truth about CSAP”

Each year we hear a litany of derogatory remarks about the CSAP exam such as how unfair, ridiculous, wasteful and absurd is the entire enterprise. Many teachers complain about most every aspect of the test from proctoring protocol to substance and some have even refused to administer the test. Some parents have caught on to this negative barrage. I have had more than a few shopping parents show up in my office asking, “Do you teach to the CSAP?” My answer usually surprises them, and maybe it will surprise you as well.

To begin, we need to start in the early '90s under the leadership of democratic Governor Roy Romer. Together with the legislature the state of Colorado set out to identify what was reasonable to expect each grade level to learn in an academic year. For example, the standards defined the reasonable expectation of a public school and its second grade students to learn during the second grade year and so on for each grade. Educators, community members and parents from all over the state began the drafting of the Colorado Model Content standards that ultimately defined the reasonable expectations per grade level in Colorado's public schools. As the story continues, after the standards were developed it was then incumbent on each public school to align its curricular and instructional program to meet these standards. After all, the standards defined the expected outcome for each grade in Colorado public schools.

But the state lacked a tool to find out how students and schools were doing at reaching those standards. In the late 90's under the leadership of republican Governor Bill Owens, the legislature passed legislation creating such a tool, the Colorado Student Assessment Program - CSAP. The exam lets the public know to what degree a given student, class, school and district is meeting the defined standards. In essence, it is a way to find out if Colorado tax payers are getting what they are paying for from Colorado public schools.

That being said, the original question of whether or not we teach to the test still stands. At Carbon Valley Academy we employ a curricular and instructional program that meets or exceeds Colorado standards. One way we know this is because schools that use the same Core Knowledge program tend to score very well on the CSAP. So, we teach to the standards which sets us up to score well on the CSAP. Therefore, in one sense yes we do teach to the test. Each year we will include CSAP results in a suite of data points aimed to inform our instructional practices with our goal of constant improvement.

Is the CSAP the single definition of an effective school? Of course not, however, such exams are useful data points that can be used in evaluation. For years our country has used ACT/SAT scores as a key indicator of a student's preparedness for college. We use tests to prove fitness for such things as a driver's license, pilot's license, medical practice and interestingly enough teaching. While imperfect, tests are important tools for a society to gain necessary levels of trust and confidence in practitioners. Likewise, it is not unreasonable to use data from a standards based exam to help determine if schools and students are meeting the standards.

Every great teacher begins their lessons with the end in mind. They know where they want their students to be after a set period of instructional time. They have articulated exactly the knowledge, content and skills that define mastery of the lesson. To find out if the students 'got it' they give a test.

Before we jump on the band wagon of CSAP bashing, lets remember the old saying “that which gets measured, gets done.”