

parent ink

VICC Counselors Advise Parents on Significance of Test Scores

As local school districts work to narrow the African-American achievement gap, VICC counselors are stressing to African-American parents and students the need to take testing seriously.

The counselors feel so strongly about testing that they developed a workshop titled "Tests Matter" which they present to parent groups as well as to students. In October, they hosted the first such workshop for parents at the VICC offices, and now the counselors are available to present the workshop at schools or city libraries at the request of a principal or district official. The counselors work with the schools in conducting a similar workshop for student audiences.

"The message is the same for both parents and students -- that success on tests is a major factor in determining how far students can go in life -- and the hope is that parents will reiterate that message to their children at home," explains VICC counselor Vickie Williams.

"Testing is a common occurrence throughout life whether it be in school, for a drivers' license or an occupation license such as real estate, or for a job promotion," Williams noted in the workshop. "So it's best to stress to children now that tests are here to stay and that they must do well on them. Test results



"Tests Matter" is the subject of a workshop developed by the VICC counselors. Here, Vickie Williams, at left, and Jennifer Christy lead the workshop for a group of parents. Covered in the workshop are the importance of students scoring well on tests, details about the MAP test and suggestions on how parents can help their children do their best. The workshop is available at the request of school principals or district officials. Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman

can help determine our success."

Lindbergh parent Shunda Bradford recently attended the "Tests Matter" workshop and thinks it would be beneficial for all parents to hear. "As parents, we need to always be encouraging our children and letting them know what we expect from them, or otherwise they can become lax," she said. "The workshop offered some good ideas on what we can do to help our children be successful."

In the workshop, the counselors covered information about the standardized state MAP

test and what the scores mean. "High MAP scores can determine gifted placement, identify disabilities and measure future preparedness," VICC counselor Jennifer Christy told parents. "These are not the kinds of tests we took when we were kids. It's not just a guessing game with multiple choice. There's quite a bit of writing. Children are being asked a lot."

To get students to place a high priority on testing, Christy advises parents, "Let your children know you will be awaiting the results."

Recommendations for Parents to help students perform well on the MAP test

- Check out the website for the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, www.dese.mo.gov. You'll find lots of good information about the MAP test and how it's scored, sample questions and answers and test-taking tips.
- Communicate with the school to find out what you can do to support your child in doing well. If needed, ask about tutoring programs or special help. If your child excels, push for challenging courses such as honors or advanced placement (college level).
- Keep a positive attitude as you encourage your child to do his/her best.
- Have high expectations for your child.
- In summary, show the school you care about your child's education by staying informed and involved. Attend conferences, share information about your child with his teacher(s), take heed of any suggestions the school may offer. Remember, it is always best when the school and family work as a team.

Highway 40 Closing: What Parents Should Know

The VICC transportation office has been focused for nearly a full year on bus route planning as part of the effort to make the Highway 40 shutdown as easy on VICC families as possible.

For example when this school year started, all VICC busses had already been rerouted off of Highway 40 so that there would be no major disruptions halfway through the school year once the western portion of the highway shut down. Also, changes were made for other routes that are impacted by the traffic displaced from Highway 40 closures.

"We wanted to have our rerouting already in place right from the beginning, which meant adding 36 additional busses," says VICC transportation operations manager Tami Webb. Webb also noted that for each new route, there is an alternate plan in case of traffic backups. Part of this rerouting has included the consolidation of pick-up and drop-off points in an effort to reduce student ride times, but this mainly affects those students at the grade levels when they are moving from elementary to middle school or middle to high school, normally

sixth and ninth grades.

During the planning for this major reconstruction project (which will affect student transportation for two more school years), Webb and her staff have been working closely with officials from MODOT (Missouri Division of Transportation), as well as with administrators and staff from all of the school districts. They have also talked to parents at the districts' VICC parent meetings and sent out multiple mailings.

Despite all the preparation and planning, Webb warns that delays and disruptions are almost certain to occur. "We appreciate your patience and understanding as St. Louis undertakes this massive reconstruction project."

The VICC student transportation program involves about 360 busses, 100+ taxis, over 500 drivers and upwards of nine million total miles driven annually in recent years.



A team of dedicated individuals comprise the VICC transportation office, responsible for getting 8,000 students to and from their schools each day. Their main focus of late has been planning and responding to route changes necessitated by the closing of Highway 40. Pictured here are from left, in front, Renee Yates, Tami Webb and Diane Sawyer; in back, from left, Rick Fountain, Pam Gigers, Wendy Williams, Felicia Carlisle and Dan Conners. Photo by Marilyn Zimmerman

Highway 40 Information at a Glance From VICC Transportation Office

Resources

thenewi64.org
dist6.modot.gov/mapmytrip
gatewayguide.com
 toll free telephone
 number: 511

- Student safety is ALWAYS our primary concern
- The VICC Transportation Office, phone number 314.721.8657, is open from 6:30 a.m. until 6 p.m. or until all students on regular afternoon routes are safely transported to their designated stop.
- Revised transportation cards will be mailed to your home when -- because of possible rerouting -- pick-up and drop-off locations and/or times change. **Please keep your mailing address up to date with the VICC Office.**
- Your patience and understanding are requested and appreciated.

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Student's Career Direction Shaped by High School Classes

by Peggy Magee

Brittney Patton chose her path in life after discovering her strengths at Rockwood's Lafayette High School. And by taking on a leadership role there, she became more confident and outgoing.

The 2007 graduate, from north St. Louis, currently attends Sullivan University's National Center for Hospitality Studies in Louisville, Ky. where she studies culinary arts, with a specialty in baking and pastry. She gravitated toward the culinary arts field after taking classes in the Family and Consumer Science department at Lafayette. "My eyes were opened to different careers," notes the soft spoken, polite teen who admits to having a language impairment that makes it difficult for her to process and articulate her

thoughts.

Brittney originally believed fashion design would be her calling. But when she struggled with moving beyond her sketches to the execution stage, she turned her attention to cooking, something she had enjoyed "ever

since I was little," she says. She took Basic Foods, Intermediate Foods and International Specialty Cuisine. In her Personal and Career Development class, she learned about resume writing, cover letters and job interview techniques.

During a one-week cake decorating unit, teacher Rebecca Lawrence was impressed with Brittney's "attention to detail, her expertise and precision and the way she stayed calm and collected under pressure." When it came to cake decorating, Brittney demonstrated both "an artistic eye and the know-how," her teacher says.

In addition to learning and practicing her cooking skills, Brittney gained valuable information from the guest speakers her teachers arranged. Some of those speakers, representing colleges that offer culinary training, shared information about job opportunities in culinary arts and admission information about their various programs.

Also shedding light on what it takes to achieve success as a culinary student was Brittney's teacher, Ms. Lawrence, who had begun a summer study program toward her chef title at a Florida culinary school. Brittney remembers hearing her teacher talk about that experience and thinking to herself, "That is the direction I'd like to go in."

Another personal goal of hers was to "come out of my shell" -- to put an end to the anxiety she felt when she had to approach people she didn't know or speak in front of an audience. So when an opportunity arose for Brittney to take the helm of



Brittney Patton's interest and skills in cooking intensified at Rockwood's Lafayette High School. Here, Brittney works with her teacher Rebecca Lawrence in International Specialty Cuisine class. Photo by Peggy Magee

Lafayette's Black Student Union, a club she had been active in, she accepted the position of president. While she did worry about not measuring up because of her disability, she knew it was in her best interest to try. "What impressed me the most about Brittney is that despite her language impairment, she led meeting after meeting," notes teacher Cheryl Hermach, the group's sponsor. "She had an agenda and she got the job done. I admire her for doing something she knew would be difficult for her and doing it well."

For Brittney, overcoming

her shyness was just one of the things she accomplished. Under her leadership, the student body became more enlightened about the Black Student Union, she says, "that it's a multicultural club and not restricted to any one race." And for that she is just as proud.

Lafayette High School steered Brittney in a direction that she is happy with and one which will bring her closer to her dream job of becoming a wedding cake designer at Walt Disney World.



Brittney Patton, a 2007 graduate of Lafayette High School, now studies culinary arts at Sullivan University. Photo by Peggy Magee.



Bruce Ellerman

Message from the CEO

Overcoming Obstacles

Upon first review of the articles in this issue of the Parent Link, a shared theme may not be immediately obvious to you. I mean, what does the Highway 40/I-64 closure, a new achievement gap initiative emphasizing the importance of test scores to parents and a student success story all have in common? Well, surprisingly enough, something pretty important. They are all examples of getting around roadblocks. Of getting something done despite challenges. Of overcoming obstacles.

Come to think of it, that's a pretty common aspect of life in general, isn't it? Aren't we always trying to find a better way to do something? To get what we want? Actually, I think this mentality begins in childhood. For example, can't you remember specifically choosing which parent you would ask if you

could go somewhere? Yeah, tell me who you asked wasn't based upon improving your odds for success! On bypassing the most likely source of an objection. Hey, if you know one way is blocked, why not try another avenue? Basic human nature, that's all.

This pattern then continues as an adult where we look for the shortest check-out lines or for the traffic lane that moves the best. Or perhaps for an alternative use for that ab crunch accessory excitedly purchased during a short-lived period of extreme fitness motivation.

Of course, instead of trying to go around an obstacle, sometimes it makes more sense to move the obstacle itself. I remember a story of a king who obstructed a well-travelled path with a large boulder, under which he had placed a great treasure. He then hid to observe what would happen. Upon approaching the boulder, most people simply went off the

path and around it. However, eventually one traveller took the time and expended the effort necessary to remove the boulder, finding the treasure underneath.

The point is we all face challenges. We all face "boulders" in our paths. We always will. But how we respond to such obstacles determines our ultimate destinations. Whether we go around them or remove them doesn't really matter. Either way you wind up on the other side. The other side of the highway closure this spring. The other side of taking tests seriously. The other side of the door to a fantastic career opportunity.

Or, in rare cases, the other side of using an ab cruncher as a clothes drying rack.

Uh huh, I thought you'd know what I meant...

Bruce Ellerman

Spotlights

Thomas Gholston and **Antoin Kyles**, fourth grade students at Mehlville's Oakville Elementary School, have been named Citizens of the Month.

Darius Black, a fifth grade student at Kirkwood's Keyser Elementary School, was recognized for scoring in the 99th percentile nationwide in math on his MAP tests.

Meonaka Ware, a seventh grade student at Oakville Middle School, was selected to represent St. Louis at the 2007 Miss American Preteen Pageant in Orlando, Fla.

Mehlville High School senior **Marcus Zomphier** is the first student in Mehlville School District history to participate as a member of the Missouri All-State Show Choir. He is also a member of the All-Suburban Honor Choir. He also serves as head choreographer for the Mehlville Show Choir.

Highlights

Applications for new students for the city to county transfer program are now available. Please call 314.721.8422, ext. 3023 or 3025, for more information.

A new Missouri law went into effect in July, 2007, raising the mandatory attendance age for students who live in the city of St. Louis. Students must attend school through the age of 17.