

Hawthorn District 73

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The Curriculum Quarterly

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Zook's Nook

In recent weeks, newspaper headlines have been telling parents and the community about the results of the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). At Hawthorn, ISATs are just one of many ways teachers assess student progress.

What should parents know about tests such as ISATs? W. James Popham has written a helpful article entitled *Ten "Must-Know" Facts About Educational Tests*, excerpted below. The complete article, which includes brief explanations and potential action implications for parents, is posted at www.hawthorn73.org (see learning@hawthorn). Additional resources are also available at ioxassessment.com.

10 "Must-Know" Facts about Educational Tests

1. Educational tests are much less accurate than most parents believe.
2. Educational tests allow teachers to make *inferences* about a student's unseen skills or knowledge, but these inferences may not always be correct.
3. High-stakes tests, depending on the way the tests are constructed, can have a strong *positive* or *negative effect* on the education that children receive.
4. Although *achievement tests* are designed to assess what a student already knows, and *aptitude tests* are designed to predict student success in a subsequent academic setting, it is sometimes difficult to tell them apart.
5. Traditionally constructed standardized achievement tests can provide parents and teachers useful information about a student's performance relative to others.
6. Tests dominantly designed to permit a student's test-score to be compared with the test-scores of other students **should not** be used to evaluate school quality.

(continued on page 2, column 2)

Guru on Grading Policies – Thomas Guskey – Coming to Hawthorn

Dr. Thomas Guskey is Professor of Educational Policy Studies and Evaluation at the University of Kentucky and widely known for his work in education reform, assessment, grading practices, and mastery learning. As a consultant to schools throughout the world, he helps bring clarity and insight to some of education's most complex problems.

On December 14 and 15, Dr. Guskey will visit Hawthorn to conduct a workshop entitled *The Battle Over Report Cards: Grading Policies and Practices That Work and Improving Student Learning with Standards, Assessments, and Grading*. He'll work with many of our Hawthorn Local Trainers (HLTs) as well as the Action Team that is investigating and developing standards-based reporting systems. During the training, we will look at current research about grading and reporting as it relates to the instructional process, as well as at guidelines for better grading and reporting practices.

Information from the Guskey workshops and the work done by the Standards-based Reporting Systems Action Team will be posted on the learning@hawthorn link on our website.

Whole Faculty Study Groups Target Instructional Needs of Students

In August, more than fifty Hawthorn teachers and administrators took part in Carlene Murphy's Whole Faculty Study Group (WFSG) training. Murphy, well known for her work with teachers and students, is the founder of the National Center for Whole Faculty Study Groups in Augusta, GA, and prolific author on WFSGs and their benefits to student achievement. Over the past 17 years, Carlene has helped more than 400 schools in 21 states implement Whole Faculty Study Groups.

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Whole Faculty Study Groups — *continued*

What are WFSGs? They are the heart of a job-embedded, self-directed, student-driven ***professional development system***. Each individual WFSG is a professional learning community that strives to increase student learning by engaging in cycles of data-driven action research that puts into practice all that teachers have been trained to do.

In groups no larger than five, study group members:

- 1) deepen their own knowledge and understanding of what is taught
- 2) design lessons
- 3) take action in their classrooms
- 4) assess student results
- 5) reflect on their actions and on student results
- 6) take joint responsibility for the students they teach

The WFSG System is grounded in the following questions: What do students need for teachers to do so that teachers will have a deeper understanding of what they teach? What do students need for teachers to do so that teachers will be more skillful in how they teach?

The guiding question that we will report back to you on is "What are students learning and achieving as a result of what teachers are learning and doing in study groups?"

Research shows that the Whole Faculty Study Group system will greatly benefit our students. In fact, Carlene worked with teachers at the former Junior High and Middle Schools six years ago. More recently, some of our elementary schools participated in training with Carlene's associates. As a result of our successes, Hawthorn will be implementing Whole Faculty Study Groups district-wide this year.

Contact Us

Student achievement and staff development questions, comments or topics you'd like addressed at coffees or in this newsletter may be directed to Sue Zook, Ed.D. at zooks@hawthorn73.org or 847-990-4244.

Ten "Must-Know" Facts — *continued*

7. Though only about 25 percent of a student's success in college is related to the student's score on aptitude tests such as the ACT or SAT, parents should
 - a) still help their children prepare for those tests but
 - b) avoid conveying a negative impression to a child whose test scores are not particularly high.
8. Performance tests, although both difficult and costly to score, often offer the most valid information about a student's mastery of key skills.
9. Although an *individual* student's attitudes or interests are almost impossible to accurately measure, the assessment of such *affective* outcomes for a whole group can provide powerful evidence about the quality of a school's instructional program.
10. Because educational tests (both teacher-made classroom tests as well as commercially-developed standardized tests) vary in quality, it **should not** be assumed that every test is a good one.

Wrap-Up

As you can see, these 10 "must-know" facts aren't all that intimidating. They're simply based on common sense and what measurement specialists have learned over the years.

Today's educational tests are having an ever-increasing impact on children's lives. Parents owe it to their children to learn more about those tests and the many other things that schools are doing to assess students' progress toward defined achievement targets and standards.

Curriculum Coffees

It is important that community members feel welcome and involved in our school district. Please mark your calendars and plan to attend our Community Curriculum Coffees. These **one-hour meetings**, open to all parents and community members, will be held at 6:30 p.m. prior to Board meetings at the District Office on January 23, March 13, and May 8.