

Dear MSE Parents:

Today (Oct 31) both the State of Illinois and the City of Chicago release their school report card scores and designations. The state and the city use very different ways of grading schools, and this year the scores may be a bit confusing, so we want to give you some guidance on how they get their scores and what they do and don't mean.

First, the State of Illinois has designated the MSE as a "Commendable" school for 2018. This score has been based on students' scores on the 2018 PARCC and ISA tests, as well as services the school provides, and also requires that no group in the school be performing in the bottom 5%. Our 2018 PARCC scores show significant improvement, especially in reading, and the ISA science scores also show 7% more reaching "proficient". Every sub-group, including our diverse learners, are showing improvement. We are pleased to be a Commendable school.

The City of Chicago score is where the confusion might come in. Based mostly on NWEA growth scores from Spring 2017 to Spring 2018, the city has given us a "Level 3" score and placed the school on probation. Spring 17 to Spring 18 growth was only 1%. How can that fit with the state designation, and which one is accurate?

The city's decision to stress student growth is the right one, but no student learns and grows in a straight line—growth always shows ups and downs, and it's the overall movement upward, and the rate of that movement that matters and shows learning. Many factors can also influence individual test scores—sickness, emotional upset, and distractions in the environment can lower a test score and make it not a good measure. Test scores can also be raised by things like problems with the test or posters in the classroom that have information on them that is being tested, which new teachers might forget to take down or not realize they are supposed to take down.

In Spring 2017 many, though not all, MSE students had large spikes in achievement well above their usual levels and expected growth. We are not sure why this was so, but it is very clear in the graphs of student achievement. In the fall of 2017 those scores came back down to more typical growth levels, and stayed on the growth curves that would be more normal learning curve for those students. For example, we a student who had been doing work at the 10th percentile suddenly jump up to the 60th, only to come back down to the 18th and continue to go up slowly from there. That student, and the other students, have solid learning: moving from the 10th to the 18th percent over a school year is gaining significantly. But if you measure only the difference between the sp17 score—60th—and the sp18 score—18th—it looks like this student has done very badly. And this is how the city measures growth. In a case like this, those data points are misleading, and to get the real story you have to look at the student's growth through a number of different measures.

Our Fall 17-Spring 18 growth measures, for the actual school year last year, are very solid: the 6th and 7th grade actually managed to reach the 71st and 89th percentile nationally for growth in math, and the 5th grade and 6th grade reached the 92nd and 82nd percentiles in

reading. Our growth scores measured from last fall to this fall are also very strong, and show that students came back from the summer strong and learning, where most students nationally actually see a summer drop (ours didn't). That doesn't help us with the city score, but it does tell the true story of the learning that is happening here.

We are working hard as a school to make those larger growth numbers the norm across the school in the next year, with new individual goal setting and progress monitoring for students, especially in reading. We expect 2018-2019 to be a very strong year, and to return to our Level 1 status.