**The State Assessment Results – What do they tell us? What should we continue to remember?**

State-wide results of North Dakota’s K-12 reading and math assessment results are due to be announced soon. We’ve learned that State Aggregate results will be made available next week. Please know that as of yet, we do not have individual student results. As soon as we do, that will be shared with you. There has been much publicity regarding the assessments this past year, and we feel it is important to try to help you understand why there has been publicity, and to outline for you how these are assessments are different from those in the past, and how we hope the information we learn can help us as the school and you as a parent work as a team in the pursuit of the best possible educational experience for your child.

Before we dig too deeply into the assessment, we must acknowledge some things to level the playing field. We all know students do not master skills at the same rate; each individual child has their strengths and weaknesses. This single test cannot measure what we know about your child. Many of our students play sports, play musical instruments, dance, sing, speak multiple languages, write and perform poetry or songs, and create amazing works of art. We have students working jobs at night or over the weekends to help support their family. Many of our students are the main caregivers for younger siblings late into the evening hours. Our classrooms are reflective of a multi-faceted student involved in a wide variety of activities, both academic and extra-curricular. As we educate your child, we are always aware of these things. Our #1 focus is not just on a year-end assessment, however, it is a piece of the very large puzzle of working with our students to help them achieve goals.

These tests are different from the types of tests students have taken in the past, and certainly different from what most parents (and grandparents) experienced. Instead of asking students to simply give answers based on acquired knowledge, the new tests ask students to apply that knowledge to new situations. This is the very skill that is needed of them after school. These skills take time to acquire. The test format is different from what students have experienced in recent years. We experienced technical difficulties as a state this year with the new format – however, our students worked hard with us to overcome those issues. Because of these technical issues, we are taking all score reports with an additional level of caution. However, the most important thing to remember when we look at this together is the new tests are designed to be more challenging. The test is much more difficult. We expect the scores to reflect that level of challenge.

The new tests measure more than just knowing the basic facts of reading, writing and arithmetic. Instead, the tests are designed to tell if a student is learning to think critically and solve more advanced problems – to handle the more complex demands of college, technical education and the workplace.

North Dakota students have been taking state assessments for more many years. Over time, the tests were revised to align with changes in curricular expectations, but the results were reported in a similar fashion in the past. Teachers and parents grew to understand the score reports and designed ways to use the results to improve student achievement.  Everyone became focused on the goals of Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and 100 percent of students proficient in reading and math.

Now we are in a large transition; the new state assessments tell us a very different story. The North Dakota Academic Standards are more rigorous and the assessments are designed in a way that students must do more problem solving to find the answers. Previous tests asked all students the same set of questions and simply provided the percent each student answered correctly. The new computer-assisted, computer-generated tests adapt to the first set of responses to determine the next set of questions at an individual level of difficulty that acknowledges a student’s growth and depth of knowledge.  Where once we were concerned with “minimum proficiency,” today’s assessments are designed to show evidence of each student’s progress on their college and career-ready path.

Over the years, we’ve have come to expect more students scoring in the top category each year. Because of the higher standards and the adaptive nature of the tests, we should anticipate fewer students at the top than we experienced with the old assessment. But in reality, it is not possible or appropriate to compare the old method of testing and the old score reports with the new reports you’ll see this year. The assessments results shared cannot truly be compared to previous years. We are looking at this year as a baseline and we are searching for growth moving forward.

The bar is much higher than what was expected under AYP. The new tests are designed to give parents, students and educators a better and earlier measure of student progress on these tougher standards. We hope that over time and experience that we will be able to derive that information we are seeking. The 20th century job market demanded a college degree for about one-third of our nation’s workforce. By 2020, it is projected that over two-thirds of the jobs in the United States will require some type of postsecondary education: technical training or college degree.  That is a dramatic shift that challenges our teachers and our youth.

Individual student results are just beginning to arrive to some districts. As a state, about 85% of the scores are in and we anticipate that the state will release the data that they have on how we are doing from the large view as a state. We will all see the new reports for the first time over the next few weeks and months. You will hear more about them as we begin to analyze the scores and work to capitalize on what we learn from this uniquely innovative approach to student growth. We invite you to ask questions as we all learn about them together.

Thank you for your ongoing support of our school district, our teachers, and our students.