

May 30, 2013

Dear Parents,

As we come to the end of the school year, I wanted to reach out to share important information about your child's education.

Over the past few years, Minnesota has taken significant steps to better prepare students for success in college, career and life. As a result of those efforts, Minnesota students are learning English language arts and mathematics under new, more challenging standards. These standards have been designed to closely align with the real-world knowledge students will need to succeed in college and the workplace. In the 2010-2011 school year, all schools began teaching the new mathematics standards, and this year, teachers began instructing students using the Common Core English language arts standards. All of the new Minnesota academic standards set very high expectations for students to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the subjects they learn in school.

The transition to new standards also means that we are using new state tests to measure the progress your child is making toward meeting these higher expectations. It is likely, given the more challenging content students are being tested on, that we may see what looks like a drop in reading test scores when they are reported later this summer. I want to make it very clear that comparing last year's reading scores to this year's reading scores is not appropriate: last year's tests and this year's tests are measuring two different sets of expectations. Instead, this year's test scores should be considered a new starting point for performance. We should expect to see future increases in scores each year as teachers and students become more familiar with the standards and better prepared to meet the challenges they present.

Additionally, you may be aware that some students experienced technical difficulties in taking online tests this spring. That comes as no surprise – any of us who have used a computer or a cell phone know that technology is not perfect or foolproof. That said, online assessments are the way of the future and Minnesota continues to be a pioneer in the use of these assessments. When the technical difficulties occurred, the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) extended the deadline for students to complete the tests. MDE also allowed students to restart or continue their testing at a later time and gave them the opportunity to review their previous answers.

In order to ensure that all student results reported this summer are fair and reliable, we are currently working with an outside organization to analyze the test data. We are looking at the overall impact of the testing interruptions and any impact they may have had on individual student scores. Based on the findings of this investigation, we will take any necessary steps to ensure the test results reported later this summer are accurate.

Some parents have asked us whether all of the testing students undergo is necessary. We have asked ourselves and federal education officials that question as well. We are committed to

administering better tests that will help us get better results and doing away with less meaningful student testing.

Minnesota students are no longer required to take the high school exit GRAD tests. We have replaced these with tests aimed at better preparing students for success in college and the workplace. Along with the more meaningful high school tests, students will also be engaging in personally-relevant exploration and planning activities at an early age to help them focus on their career and educational aspirations.

Our goal for student testing is to provide parents with clear information about how their child is doing in learning the academic standards and to provide teachers with timely and useful information that helps them better meet the needs of every student. We will continue to provide you with information about our progress, and we welcome your input in our efforts to better serve Minnesota students.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Dr. Brenda Cassellius".

Dr. Brenda Cassellius
Commissioner