

## *Superintendent's Corner*



The last several months have been a challenging journey as we moved toward the release of the scores from the more rigorous North Dakota State Assessment.

I know there was a tremendous amount of anxiety throughout our state in anticipation of these scores being made public. I will tell you honestly that I doubt anyone was more anxious than I was. As the state schools superintendent, I am held responsible, in every media market and coffee group, for the performance of all of our state's students.

When the scores were released, I told reporters that we should all be pleased about having a more honest assessment of our students' knowledge in English and mathematics. I stand by those statements. Our scores are a good baseline, but we have much work to do.

There were many claims that this new assessment was flawed, and even that it was a failure. This is not accurate. The fact that 80 percent of our students were able to complete all four components of the test electronically provides strong evidence that the assessment was not the fiasco that some in our media claimed it to be.

Forty percent of our state's students were proficient or higher in math and 46% were proficient or higher in English language arts. These scores are in line with North Dakota results from other nationally regarded assessments, including the National Assessment for Educational Progress (NAEP).

The 2013 NEAP results showed 48 percent of the fourth graders and 40 percent of the eighth graders were proficient in math, and 34 percent of fourth and eighth graders were proficient in reading.

North Dakota ACT results also provide some context. North Dakota law requires high school juniors to take the ACT. Forty-two percent of the students in North Dakota's Class of 2015 met the ACT's college readiness benchmark for mathematics.

Results from the new assessment should not be compared to scores from the state's previous tests in past years. The scores establish a new baseline against which to measure our future results.

These assessments are coupled with higher academic standards. They were designed to be more challenging. They are focused on developing skills in critical thinking and problem-solving. Our expectations in content and performance are higher. We believe our results will be even higher in the future as our stronger math and English learning standards are taught.

These assessments are meant to improve student preparation for what to expect in college, career or the military. We need to minimize the need for remedial instruction at the post-secondary level, which will save our students time and money.

This is the first year of a new testing system, and scoring did require extra time and attention, as you would expect when you're doing something for the first time. I expect next year's results to be available in the summer of 2016.

I am grateful for everyone's support and patience. We are on a new, challenging and sometimes stressful path, but I am confident that if we continue to walk it together with grace and professionalism our students will benefit and experience the support and success they deserve.

Thank you for all you do in your schools each and every day.

Until next time,

Kirsten Baesler