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Baesler: ND Students Most Improved In AP Classes

BISMARCK, N.D., Sept. 16, 2015 – Superintendent of Public Instruction Kirsten Baesler said North Dakota students were the nation’s most improved in Advanced Placement exam results in English, math and science during the last school year.

The number of North Dakota exams that got passing grades in 2015 jumped 16.9 percent, the largest increase in the country, Baesler said Wednesday. The average national increase was 5.5 percent, according to data from the College Board, which offers the Advanced Placement tests.

Baesler praised the news. “Although these increases are good, we still have a lot of improvement to make,” the superintendent said.

Baesler is trying to make it possible for more North Dakota students to take Advanced Placement exams. According to College Board data from 2014, the most recent year available, North Dakota ranked 51st among the 50 states and the District of Columbia in the percentage of students who took at least one AP examination in high school. North Dakota’s percentage was 13.8 percent; the national average was 35.7 percent.

During the 2015 Legislature, Baesler successfully introduced an initiative called “Leveraging the Senior Year,” which featured support for broadening the availability of AP exams to North Dakota students.

“Leveraging the Senior Year” includes scholarships for AP students, instructional materials and mentoring, training for instructors interested in teaching AP classes, and workshops for existing AP instructors who want to sharpen their skills.

Baesler said she hears often from high school students, including members of the Student Cabinet that she founded last spring, about the need for more Advanced Placement options. The students tell her they have taken all of the dual-credit and higher-level courses available to them, Baesler said.

Baesler has put special emphasis on the need for more AP offerings in mathematics and science. Advanced Placement classes can enrich and deepen a high school student’s education, and allows students to accumulate college credits before they arrive on campus. This can save money for students and their families, and shorten the time it takes to graduate, Baesler said.

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State Sen. Tim Flakoll, R-Fargo, the chairman of the North Dakota Senate's Education Committee, said he would like to see at least 20 to 25 percent of North Dakota students earn at least one semester of college credit before they graduate from high school.

"Every time we have challenged our students, they have responded," Flakoll said. "We're going to continue to challenge them at a higher level. We're going to have more access, and more teacher preparedness, so that our students can take these AP courses and test successfully. We expect this trend to continue, and we expect to really see some impressive gains in the years to come."

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