

May 30, 2013

Dear Superintendents,

With the close of the 2012-13 testing window, I wanted to take this opportunity to connect with you to provide important information prior to the release of test results later this summer.

We have much to celebrate and highlight as we move farther in our statewide transition to rigorous reading and mathematics standards and assessments designed to put every student on track for college or career. Your leadership has been instrumental during this transition, as just three years ago, you began to guide teachers and school leaders in implementing the new math standards, and this school year, you led the statewide effort to implement the Common Core English language arts standards.

New academic standards have required the use of new state assessments for students to demonstrate success in meeting the more challenging standards. Students took the new reading test for the first time this spring. When test results come out later this summer, I encourage you to be aware of the potential, given the more challenging content students are being tested on, for what looks like a drop in reading test scores. 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 standards of expectation. Instead, this year's test scores should be considered a new starting point for performance. We should expect to see corresponding increases each year as teachers and students become more familiar with the standards and better prepared to meet the challenges they present. We saw a similar dip in statewide test scores after the new mathematics test in 2011. It is important to note that new assessments always give us the opportunity to establish a new baseline for student performance, and comparisons cannot be made between results on two different tests.

In addition to the transition to new reading standards and assessments, we also had a change in the mathematics testing program this year. With the changes to federal guidelines and the more prominent role of growth in accountability calculations, we shifted from three testing opportunities to one testing opportunity for students in grades 3-8. Although results are not yet final, we are making every effort to be proactive in communicating the potential for an overall short-term drop in math scores as a result of this change.

Additionally, it comes as no surprise that some districts experienced technical difficulties in administering online tests this spring. MDE recognized these challenges and made the decision to extend the state's testing window as well as give students the opportunity to restart or continue an assessment at a later time. Now that the testing window has closed, we have contracted with an independent third party to conduct a thorough analysis of the data so that we can fully understand the potential impact of the testing interruptions. The investigation will

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consider several factors, and based on the findings of the analysis, MDE will take any steps necessary to ensure reliable and fair results are reported.

We will continue to update you as more information becomes available on the results of this year's student testing, and we encourage you to engage parents in this discussion as well. We are providing you with a parent letter that you may want to use to help communicate some of the information I outlined for you today. Please feel free to use the letter in whole or in part to communicate these complex issues with parents; we simply ask that other than accommodating for translation, you not edit the letter in any way.

Thank you for your continued partnership as we work together to provide our students with better assessments that lead to improved teaching and learning. I look forward to continuing our work together to help every Minnesota student reach their full potential.

Sincerely,

Dr. Brenda Cassellius

Commissioner

[Access Parent Letter](#)