

Dear Superintendents,

In an effort to always keep you informed, I would like to take this opportunity to provide some updates on the forthcoming release of statewide assessment and accountability results.

First, I want to remind you that this year's results reflect two important changes that occurred in test administration policy. Both of these changes may be reflected in this year's scores.

- A decision made by the previous administration allowed districts the option to let students retake the MCA III Math assessments up to three times in 2012 and to use the highest score for accountability purposes. However, our flexibility waiver allows the state to move beyond a pure proficiency measure and take student growth into consideration. Therefore, this year MDE was required to return to a single test administration for accountability purposes.
- Further, 2013 is the first year students took the MCA III Reading test, which as you know, is aligned to very rigorous college and career readiness standards.

Additionally, last spring I indicated that the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) was working with a third-party to conduct thorough analyses of the 2013 online assessments to fully understand the potential impact of the testing interruptions on April 16 and April 23. The investigation into the effects of the computer disruptions on student and school scores is finished, and the final report can be found on the Test Administration page of MDE's website.

[View the Test Administration webpage.](#)

A number of analyses were conducted at both the student level and the school level to investigate whether the computer disruptions impacted scores. Those analyses revealed that the statewide effects on scores were neither widespread nor large, and nothing emerged in a systematic way across grades or subjects. It is also important to note that the report found no evidence that the disruptions had a widespread or consistently negative impact, and in some individual student cases, the disruption was actually beneficial to their scores.

While the report concludes that there is no statistical evidence to suggest that the disruption, on average, adversely impacted students and schools that tested on April 16 or April 23, it does not mitigate the potentially undesirable experience that some students experienced throughout Minnesota because of the technical difficulties in administering online tests.

I want to emphasize that although the report suggests the technical difficulties did not lead to widespread or significant effects on *statewide* student and school scores, there is no doubt that a number of Minnesota students were affected on those days. However, because of your leadership and the extraordinary dedication and hard work of students, teachers, parents, and administrators, the impact of the disruptions on those days was minimized.

Rest assured, I am doing everything within my power to ensure Minnesota's testing vendor, American Institutes for Research (AIR), is fully prepared for future online assessments in Minnesota. I am instructing AIR to take all preventative measures to make sure this does not happen again.

In addition to working with our vendor, MDE consulted with the Minnesota Technical Advisory Committee (TAC). This committee is comprised of technical and policy experts on educational measurement from across the nation. The following statement reflects the recommendation from the Minnesota TAC:

*"We [TAC] make recommendations and provide guidance to the Minnesota Department of Education on technical aspects of its large-scale student assessment and accountability systems. We have been working with MDE to determine how best to proceed in light of the technical difficulties with the online administration of the 2013 exams. Our focus was to ensure that fair, valid and reliable test results are provided to Minnesota's students, educators, parents, and citizens. We provided guidance to HumRRO, an independent third-party contractor, who developed an analysis plan to explore the possible impact of the disruptions on scores. Based upon our review of this independent third-party analysis, we believe that reporting individual student scores for all students, including those who experienced testing disruptions, is appropriate and valid. We also conclude that these scores are appropriate and defensible for use in the Minnesota school accountability calculations."*

Based upon a review of all available data and the recommendation of the TAC, MDE will publicly release all assessment results on Aug. 27, 2013 as required for federal and state accountability, and accountability results will be released on Oct. 1, 2013. Please note that under our new accountability system no new Priority or Focus schools designations will be made this year.

As always with the statewide release of assessment and accountability results, we encourage you to continue to involve parents and community members in this discussion. Once again we are including a separate parent letter that you may wish to use to provide this information to parents. It is likely that you will only want to use this letter in the case that you are a district that experienced technical difficulties on April 16 and April 23. If you do choose to share this letter with parents, we ask that you not edit the content of the letter in any way.

Thank you for your continued leadership during this transition to online assessments that provide timelier and better information to teachers. Together, we can make certain every Minnesota student is successful in college, career and life. Best wishes for an excellent 2013-2014 school year.

Sincerely,

Dr. Brenda Cassellius  
Commissioner