

February 17, 2015

Dear Colleagues:

Thanks for all you do to further the achievement of Wisconsin's children. The work of you and your staff is truly heroic given the difficult environment. As I travel the state, I too have heard concerns about the proposed changes in assessment, how those changes might impact data in the educator effectiveness and school report card systems, and whether the state should continue with testing this year.

I want you to know my principles and position regarding our state assessments.

**The Badger Exam (Wisconsin's Smarter Balanced Assessment) is a rigorous and valid assessment that was successfully piloted across Wisconsin last year.** Everyone agrees this assessment is a vast improvement over the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE). The Badger Exam will measure our collective efforts to implement our more rigorous standards and will provide valuable feedback to our state's educators and parents.

**I support the annual testing requirements that presently are found in state and federal law, including the use of the same tests by all publically funded schools in our state.** Annual statewide assessments are necessary to provide information about student growth and achievement to parents, educators, policy-makers, and to the community. While the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), has its faults, disaggregating student achievement data by race, poverty, disability, and English language proficiency is critical for improving learning for all students.

**Wisconsin is a high achieving state overall, but we face some of the largest achievements gaps in the country.** This issue is real and affects Wisconsin's communities in different ways. An annual assessment of all students is more vital than ever to meet these challenges. Without it, we have very limited measures to inform and assist our parents, students, and educators. This principle of annual assessment remains true regardless of the test vendor or how often the test vendor changes.

**Assessments should be seen as a flashlight that helps educators and parents shine a light on students' strengths and weaknesses and supports student learning.** It is the increasing use of test results as a hammer to punish schools and educators that drives much of the fatigue and frustration. Do I think that any standardized test can totally and accurately reflect all the good work that is going on in your schools? Absolutely not. Standardized tests are one important checkpoint in time, nothing more, and nothing less. But it is one checkpoint that helps us to identify achievement gaps and successful work that is being done to close those gaps.

There is a great deal of national dialogue about testing, including the number of tests, the value of formative versus summative tests, and the role of tests in high-stakes accountability and instructional improvement. I share these concerns, signed onto a national effort to examine this, and will be working with stakeholders, including many of you, to address this in Wisconsin.

Let's get to what we know right now and a road map going forward:

1. **We will administer the Badger Exam as scheduled.** Every student is required to participate in an annual statewide assessment under state and federal law, which cannot be waived in either state or federal law. Wisconsin State Statute §118.30 and ESEA section 1111(b)(3) (20 U.S.C.-§6311(b)(3)) govern testing requirements. These are long-standing laws that are very clear with regard to the testing requirements. Failure to administer the required assessments at the state or local level will jeopardize up to \$500 million in federal education funding.
2. **If state law mandates a new Mathematics and English language arts/reading test for 2016 in grades three through eight, we will move forward to ensure that the replacement is high quality, aligned to our standards and on-line, like the Badger Exam.** The preparation and hard work you, your staff, and your students have done for this year's Badger Exam will not be wasted if the test changes for next school year.
3. **I am working at the state and federal levels to delay for one year integrating the new assessment data into educator effectiveness evaluations, and school and district report cards.** I support hitting the pause button on aspects of school report cards, and educator evaluations, related specifically to the new Badger Exam. I am working with legislators on a bill that would provide this delay for the 2014-15 school year. Also, the DPI is exploring flexibility under the federal ESEA waiver renewal process to delay integrating new assessment data for one year in the educator effectiveness system and the state's school and district report cards.
4. **As always, due to public reporting requirements, results will be included in WISEdash after you have had the chance to check them.** We will be able to smooth the transition so the longitudinal data is still relevant from last year to this year and with whatever happens in the future. Transparency of results will continue to be a high priority, even if there is a pause in the use of this assessment on the report cards.

We will be discussing what test will be used in 2015-16 and beyond with policy-makers. If vendors change, the test will be aligned with our standards. I understand the massive amount of work that has been done over the past four years on our new standards and I continue to support your hard work in using them.

I offer the DPI's support to you through our assessment period this spring. Contact Mike Thompson, PhD, Deputy State Superintendent, at [michael.thompson@dpi.wi.gov](mailto:michael.thompson@dpi.wi.gov) or 608-266-3584.

Thank you for your continued service to Wisconsin's children.

Sincerely,



Tony Evers, PhD  
State Superintendent

TE:jjp