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NEWS RELEASE

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Idaho's Achievement Testing A Success

Idaho's public schools administered achievement tests to over 177,000 students in the first statewide application of the new Idaho Standards Achievement Tests (ISAT). A combined total of over 497,000 reading, language usage and math tests were delivered as part of the statewide assessment effort.

All of the Idaho school districts participated in the assessment program. Tests were administered between September 16 and October 18, 2002, on site in the public schools. The statewide testing system provides immediate feedback on student performance, aligns with state education standards, and assists teachers in providing all students a quality education.

"The fall 2002 ISAT pilot was a huge success," said Karen McGee, State Board of Education member and chairperson of the Assessment and Accountability Commission. "The fall testing proved that we can administer a statewide test that aligns with state standards and provides immediate feedback for teachers, students and parents."

Immediate Feedback

The test provides immediate results for teachers. Unlike previous tests, the ISAT can immediately identify what strengths and areas of improvement are needed for a particular student or group of students.

With ISAT results in hand, teachers can adjust their classroom instruction and lesson plans to assure that students are achieving state educational standards. In addition, students who score well above the standards can be targeted for advanced placement.

Ahead of the Game

As a result of early board action, the process was well on its way to meet requirements associated with the federal government's "No Child Left Behind" Act in 2001.

The Idaho State Board of Education initiated development of the current Idaho achievement plan in 1997. The Standards Commission was formed by the board and charged with developing state standards for math, science, social studies, language arts/communications, health and humanities. Subsequently, the Assessment and Accountability Commission was formed and charged with determining how to assess the standards and developing an accountability plan.

The Assessment and Accountability Commission then began searching for a testing process. Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA), a national testing company based in Portland, Ore., was selected to develop a statewide application of its testing program to measure student progress in meeting Idaho standards.

In Spring 2001, three districts piloted the newly formed ISAT. The Idaho Legislature approved statewide use of the ISAT in March 2001. In Fall 2002, all Idaho districts piloted the ISAT.

Computer-Adaptive Testing

Idaho is a leader in the use of computer-adaptive testing. The computerized version of the ISAT is an adaptive test, which means it changes in difficulty level with each question the student answers.

The level of difficulty increases as a student answers a question correctly. In this way the test identifies the student's highest level of knowledge and individual performance level is identified. This student-specific approach leads to the development of individualized teaching plans for students at all levels.

In Fall 2002, 78% of the districts administered the ISAT on the computer. That number will rise to 96% of the districts for the Spring 2003 testing. Two of the larger districts, Boise and Moscow, recently announced the intent to administer the test on computers. Only 11 elementary and secondary schools will use the paper and pencil version of the test this spring.

“Using the computer technology provides a number of benefits to the students, parents and teachers,” said Dr. Randy Thompson, Board of Education Chief Academic Officer. “Immediate feedback, individualized lesson plans and level testing all contribute to improving the quality of education for all Idaho students. Use of computers makes these things possible.”

Administration of the spring ISAT tests will take place statewide between April 14 and May 16.

Additional score information can be found at www.sde.state.id.us/dept

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