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BOARD RELEASES REPORTS REVIEWING ISAT

BOISE -The State Board of Education released a series of nine reports evaluating the Idaho Standards Achievement Tests (ISAT) and school districts' efforts to teach a curriculum based on the Idaho standards. This review confirmed many of the strengths of the Idaho test and made recommendations to help the Board create a more comprehensive exam.

The ISAT is a series of three tests given to students in grades 2 through 10 in reading, math, and language usage. Students in grades 5, 7, and 10 also take a science test. The ISAT is one of a few tests in the nation that measures student growth and student learning at grade-level. Because the ISAT is a computerized test, it provides instant feedback to students, teachers and parents.

Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO) conducted the ISAT evaluations as part of the State Board's efforts to ensure students are offered a quality assessment of academic skills and to comply with federal "No Child Left Behind" requirements.

The external review evaluates ISAT's reliability, validity, alignment with Idaho standards, content validity, curriculum validity and instructional validity. Included in the nine reports are two reports focusing on Idaho districts' efforts to teach standards and communication with parents and students about the ISAT as an exit exam. HumRRO also visited six Idaho public school districts and issued a report detailing the delivery of instruction and how districts develop curriculum.

"The report offers encouraging news in terms of how far Idaho has come in assessing student achievement. In the last 10 years, we've implemented minimum standards for every child in every grade and created a test to measure those standards," said Rod Lewis, President of the State Board of Education. "The HumRRO reports also bring to light areas of improvement. We expect to work with our testing contractor Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) to further improve the assessment of our state standards."

While the current ISAT is meeting many student assessment needs, the Board plans to evaluate the HumRRO report to improve the ISAT. The first step will be to review all Idaho standards and reorganize standards, as needed and to revise the test blueprints, to enhance alignment between the standards and test questions. Rearranging the standards and constructing the new test blueprint is targeted for completion in time for the spring 2006 test.

The report indicates the ISAT has solid reliability - consistently giving students accurate scores - and validity - measuring what the test is intended to measure. The report also concluded that teachers and

administrators are taking advantage of the ISAT's ability to track student performance and to help improve instruction.

Recommendations were made in areas such as alignment that will guide the Board's efforts to make the test more comprehensive for Idaho students. The review identified the following as areas of additional improvement:

The Test Blueprint - The blueprint, which is the design specification for the test, was created by NWEA and approved by the State Board of Education and the State Department of Education. The blueprint was structured using NWEA reporting goals where standards are grouped to subject goal areas.

Organization of Standards - Currently, some subjects have too many standards, while other have too few to be adequately tested. By reorganizing the standards and improving the blueprint, the ISAT will become a more comprehensive test.

Further focus on the following four areas:

- 1) coverage of a wide range of standards,
- 2) coverage of the standards evenly,
- 3) including an adequate number of test questions per standard,
- 4) matching the question difficulty to the difficulty of the standard.

Breadth of questions - The ISAT measures the depth of some standards well, but not the breadth of the standards as a whole.