



Bringing Change and Improvement to the State's Student Assessment System

In recent years, a consensus has developed within the state Legislature and the public that changes to our assessment system are needed. We need a less complex and more responsive system of measuring students' progress toward achieving the basic skills they need to move forward in their education.

First, I want to be clear that the WASL will be administered as planned in 2009. However, in spring 2010, the state assessment, including its name, will change and resemble what lawmakers, educators and the public have been asking for.

With the new assessment system, I strongly believe we need to:

- Shorten the tests
- Reduce the amount of time students spend on written responses
- Return scores more quickly
- Increase the use of technology (ie., computer testing and scoring)
- Provide more diagnostic information (strengths and weaknesses) to teachers/families
- Minimize costs

Since the November 2008 election, I have met with my new team and current OSPI staff to develop a plan to replace the WASL.

We will immediately begin work on the new assessment system, called the Washington Comprehensive Assessment Program (WCAP), and will implement new tests next school year. In spring 2010, the WASL will be replaced by the Measurements of Student Progress (MSP), administered in grades 3-8, and the High School Proficiency Exams (HSPE), which will serve as the tests to meet the state reading and writing graduation requirements.

On a parallel track, we will replace the current math and science tests as we review and refine the standards for those content areas. We must ensure the standards are workable and reflect the real-life needs of our students. I will put forward legislation during this legislative session to delay the effective dates of the graduation requirements tied to those standards and tests until the State Board of Education can make a finding that they are "valid and reliable."

We are also planning to move the spring "accountability test," which meets the requirements set by the federal No Child Left Behind Act, to later in the spring.

Measurements of Student Progress (MSP) in Grades 3-8

The MSP will differ from the WASL in numerous and significant ways. The grades 3-8 tests will be used as tools for teachers to evaluate the progress of students with almost immediate feedback.

The grades 3-8 MSP tests will be:

- Shorter, both in time required to take the test and the number of days needed to administer it. Key components we're planning to implement are:
 - Reducing the number of "long answer" questions in reading, math and science from the current 40 percent of the WASL to no more than a quarter of the new tests. (Note: We are also examining the ways to shorten the time it takes for the writing test)
 - Shortening the reading passages on which the questions are formulated in the reading test.
 - Including "completion" items in reading and math tests, where students provide a short response (for example, a single number or one/two words). These items require more than a multiple choice item and are easily adaptable to computerized testing.
 - Making testing available twice during the school year in the spring and fall. We want to afford students more than one chance to show proficiency, and provide diagnostic and growth information to support individualized teaching plans.
 - Designing the tests for each subject area to be administered in a single sitting, allowing for students to possibly test in two subjects in one day.
- Less expensive and tied to technology. This means:
 - Students will be able to take the grades 3-8 reading, writing, math and science MSP tests on a computer. This will reduce costs and allow for a rapid response for students and teachers.
 - Computerized testing will begin as an option in 2010 and expand in 2011, with the goal of it becoming a statewide requirement by 2012. We will also look closely at the feasibility of computerized scoring of the writing test, further reducing costs.

High School Proficiency Exams (HSPE)

The High School Proficiency Exams (HSPE) will measure whether students have learned the required basic skills in reading, writing, math and science. I strongly believe in high standards and in using the reading and writing tests as part of our graduation requirements. It is also my commitment to streamline and make more readily available alternative steps to reach graduation.

As with the MSPs, the HSPE will be shorter and contain significantly fewer extended answer questions. Also, with computerization, we will be able to receive results on a faster turnaround, affording students, families and teachers better and more timely information to assist those who need to be retested time to do so.

We will pilot computerizing the reading and science test in 2010. The new end-of-course tests in math mandated by the Legislature are scheduled for 2011, and those will also be available on computer. We have the goal of statewide computerized testing in 2012, greatly reducing the resources needed to administer these tests, cutting down on storage costs and requiring far less staff time in our school districts.

Our current test contractors have a proven track record of computer testing in other states. We are confident they will be able to adapt to our new assessment plan.

We will continue to examine additional improvements to the high school tests, but we must ensure that any changes we make are tied to the graduation requirements and other guidelines outlined in the 1993 education reforms, for which I led the writing and passage of as chair of the House Education Committee.

Standards/Curriculum/EOC Testing:

- I support the current reading and writing standards, but we must always monitor how they are working in meeting our goals for our students. The standards should only be changed if and when we determine that they are falling behind the real skills needed for kids to succeed.
- I will be asking the legislature to remove the 2013 deadline for the math and science graduation requirements. It will be difficult to design an assessment based on the current science standards. The new math standards are an improvement, but we must continue to review them and propose improvements while we move ahead with the new assessment.

Existing Timelines for New Math and Science Standards (subject to change per requested legislation)

- Tests for grades 3-8 will measure the new math standards in 2010
- Tests for grades 5 and 8 will measure new science standards in 2011
- High school math and science tests will measure the new math and science standards in 2011

- The requirement to earn two math credits after 10th grade for those students who do not meet standard on the high school math assessment should remain.
- I support the move to end-of-course testing in math. The last year of the high school math WASL, if approved by the Legislature, will be 2010 (the current law calls for 2013). Four end-of-course exams will be implemented in 2011 (Algebra I, Geometry, Integrated I and II). A “core math” test measuring first and second year high school math will be available as a graduation alternative starting in 2011.
- Regarding math curriculum, I support the recommendations of the SBE’s consultants, and I will not be advancing the “Bridges” curriculum for grades K-5.

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