

BULLETIN BOARD

M-STEP to the Next Step

The M-STEP moved us out of the old world of paper-and-pencil tests. Now we need to keep moving forward with a more useful, informative and flexible testing system that will help teachers, students and parents throughout the year.

This improved system will ensure that students are learning the material along the way, so teachers know at given points throughout the school year whether students are at grade level or not, and teachers can adapt their instruction accordingly.

It also is the right test in this knowledge economy to ensure students are career- and college-ready. Employers have told me that they seek graduates with problemsolving skills, who can work in teams or as individuals, and who know content.

Using this enhanced testing system will lead to classrooms that prepare students for success, as defined by them being: curious; problemsolvers; able to communicate clearly and effectively; work both independently and in groups; able to set and achieve goals; and critical thinkers.

This will not delay school accountability, as some critics of this new system wrongly claim. This new system will be aligned with Michigan's high academic standards and be able to track student academic progress over multiple years, resulting in continued accountability of our schools.

A broad coalition of the leading education organizations has thrown their support behind this improved vision of student testing. Some have suggested that this group supported the new plan because I would support the soon-to-follow independent school funding report. Nothing could be further from the truth. There was no quid pro quo, period.

The supportive education organizations, which represent local superintendents, school boards, principals and teachers—as well as nonpublic schools, community colleges and university presidents—support this testing vision because it is the right thing to do. As also the right thing to do, I support the findings of the school funding study, if future funding is directed to a newly designed education system in Michigan. I do not support adding more money to the current system that I, the Michigan Board of Education, and the Governor's 21st Century Education Commission are looking to improve. Besides, nonpublic schools, community colleges and universities wouldn't benefit from the recommendations in the funding study anyway, yet they still support the new testing system.



This enhanced testing system being proposed would be sustained over 10 years and provide a focus on growth and proficiency, with the ability to provide immediate reporting to inform educators and parents; a stronger, year-long student growth measure for local educator evaluations that also will be the foundation of an easy-to-understand, A-through-F school accountability grading system.

It will include age-appropriate reading tests in kindergarten through second grade that the Legislature is requiring in the recently enacted third grade reading law. The new system also will have: English language arts and writing tests every year; the individual and team problemsolving exercises (with writing)—once in elementary and once in middle school; science and social studies tests; and the PSAT, SAT and the Michigan Merit Exam for the upper grades.

Local schools no longer will have the expense of administering other tests throughout the school year, and overall student testing time will be reduced.

We must set the bar higher if we're to improve student achievement and reach our collective goal of becoming a top 10 education state in 10 years. We need to know where our students are academically from start-to-finish each school year. We need to equip Michigan students with the skills to work in teams and problem solve, and make sure they can do it.

The M-STEP took us from the MEAP to a better, yet still incomplete, system. Now, it's time for the next step.

Brian Whiston

State Superintendent

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