

TO: All Principals
FROM: Maria L. Goodloe-Johnson, Ph.D., Superintendent
SUBJECT: New District Benchmark Assessment
DATE: May 18, 2009

Executive Summary

The purpose of this memo is to update you and actively engage you in the progress of a key initiative of *Excellence for All*: the PreK-12 Assessment Strategy. Please read this memo carefully as this initiative may have a major impact on student testing in your school next year.

Excellence for All set student assessment as a top priority in Seattle Public Schools (SPS). Through the Strategic Plan, we committed to pilot the computer-based Measures of Academic Progress (MAP) assessment in 2008-09, and by 2009-10, to implement a full set of assessments to track student progress and help teachers respond to student needs. A project management team was formed last year to carry out this critical component of the Plan.

After studying the results of the MAP pilot and considering best practices in assessment, the team recommended implementing MAP district-wide in reading and math in grades K-9, beginning with most schools in 2009-10. The team also recommended discontinuing the district DRA requirement in grades K and 1, discontinuing the Edusoft math benchmark assessments in elementary and middle school, and discontinuing the PSAT in 9th grade. I have approved these recommendations and asked that the project team develop with you a well thought-out MAP rollout strategy that meets every school's needs to the maximum extent possible.

In the next few weeks, Brad Bernatek and Jessica de Barros will be contacting you to describe the MAP test in more detail and the implications it might have for your school. I realize not every school will be ready to implement MAP next year – particularly elementary schools without computer labs – and I encourage you to work with Brad and Jessica to develop an assessment plan that makes the most sense for your school.

It is my intention that secondary schools, as well as elementary schools with computer labs, implement MAP in 2009-10, and that we move toward full district-wide implementation by 2010-11. The project team is actively developing solutions to computer lab capacity, summarized below.

- First, we have compiled an inventory of the number of current computers in every school in order to work with you to determine whether some computers could be moved to common areas to create full labs.
- Second, we are prioritizing schools that do not currently have computer labs in our upcoming student workstation refreshment schedule this fall.
- Third, we are planning to seek funds in the BTA III levy (scheduled for February 2010) to support schools without labs.

It is critical for **all** of us – principals, teachers, and central office staff – to know on a frequent basis whether students are making gains and on-track to meet district and state standards. Providing you and your staff with the best tools possible to close the education gap is my number-one goal in making this decision.

This memo will review the background on how we reached this decision, the impact it will have on the district, the outcomes it will produce, and next steps.

Background

Consultant Report Findings

To begin this work, a consultant was hired last year to provide background research on assessment best practices, inventory current assessments in SPS, and identify current priorities of assessment among SPS stakeholders. The consultant report recommended the district prioritize its purposes of assessment, streamline the number of assessments administered, and increase “data literacy,” or knowledge about how to use assessment data, among teachers and principals.

Stakeholder Priorities

In interviews and surveys, stakeholders identified three high-priority purposes of assessment:

- Drive instruction;
- Monitor student learning on an ongoing basis; and,
- Diagnose special needs to place students in services.

Stakeholders also identified three high-priority criteria that they believed the district should use in selecting an assessment strategy:

- Provide data that are immediately useful for instruction;
- Be aligned to state-wide Grade Level Expectations; and,
- Provide rich, detailed student data.

Project Charge

The PreK-12 Assessment Strategy project team started out by prioritizing the district’s purposes of assessment. The purpose of the PreK-12 Assessment Strategy project is to design, develop and implement a common PreK-12 district-wide assessment “toolbox” in reading and math. Common assessment data will be used to:

- Consistently track student progress;
- Inform instruction;
- Measure student growth;
- Inform district-level decision making; and,
- Provide students and their families with information on learning.

The project team, led by Brad Bernatek and Jessica de Barros, included experts in the district’s reading, math, technology, special education, bilingual, advanced learning and assessment departments, as well as the Seattle Education Association. The group also conducted one-on-one outreach to principals through PASS.

2008-09 Work Completed

The project charge for this year was to improve the district’s current Edusoft assessments, pilot MAP in nine schools, and recommend a set of assessment tools for district-wide use beginning in 2009-10. MAP, a computer-adaptive assessment, was administered in fall and winter in the nine

schools and is being administered again in May. Teachers, principals and central office staff have been trained on MAP and surveyed on their experience using it this year.

In addition to the work on MAP, the Research, Evaluation & Assessment department and math coaches worked to improve Edusoft math assessments and the training program for elementary and middle school.

To select a set of assessment tools, the project team prioritized the implementation of a district-wide benchmark (three times per year) assessment in SPS beginning in 2009-10. The team distinguished the types of assessments needed in a comprehensive system:

- Benchmark – Aligned to grade level standards, measures growth, provides diagnostic and placement data, and informs instruction.
- Curricular – Aligned to the scope & sequence of a curriculum. These would likely be in the form of end of unit assessment.
- Formative – High frequency, classroom-based assessments that inform instruction on a daily basis.

The Team also studied the results of the MAP pilot this year. A follow-up survey of MAP teachers conducted after the winter testing window showed:

- 78% had reviewed their students' MAP data; and,
- 57% understood how to determine student growth from fall to winter.

Teachers also rated MAP higher than other assessments with respect to:

- Turnaround time for results (89%)
- Amount of data on student skills provided (71%)
- Student growth data provided (68%)
- Usability by teachers to use results to inform instruction (63%)
- Amount of time required (61%)

Teachers rated MAP “about the same” as other assessments with respect to:

- Alignment to state standards (49%); and
- Adaptability to special populations (bilingual, special education, advanced learners) (29%)

The Team researched and analyzed several benchmark assessments, developed criteria to use in selecting assessments, and identified three that could potentially meet the needs of SPS:

1. Continue Edusoft math assessments, adding a high school math benchmark, and adding the Scholastic Reading Inventory in grades K-9;
2. MAP in grades K-9; and,
3. Stanford-10, a norm-referenced test, in grades K-9.

The criteria used to reach these options were:

- The ability to administer the assessment two-to-six times per year;
- Alignment to state standards;

- Predictability of WASL performance;
- Adaptability to specific populations (bilingual, special ed, advanced learners, struggling students);
- Speed of turnaround time for results;
- Measurement of student growth;
- Usability of results for teachers; and,
- Ease of communication with families.

From the options above, and using these criteria, the Team recommended MAP as the best option for SPS.

The Team also recommended discontinuing district DRA requirement in grades K and 1 (except for struggling students), discontinuing the Edusoft math benchmark assessments in math, and discontinuing and the PSAT in 9th grade.

The PSAT will continue to be administered in grades 10 and 11. The DRA will continue to be administered to 2nd grade students one time per year in the fall, which is a state requirement, and administered one or two times per year to students who are identified by MAP as significantly below grade level.

MAP Pros & Cons

Below are some of the pros and cons of MAP identified by the Assessment Team.

Pros

- Aligned to state standards
- Adaptable to special populations through computer adaptability
- Results are immediately available to teachers and principals
- Measures student growth with the option to compare to growth norms
- Would have one test for reading and math across levels with a single vertical scale

Cons

- Computer-adaptive test requires computer labs in schools
- Requires more up-front professional development
- Logistical support from school staff is needed
- In some cases, impacts library use and librarian time
- Because the test is adaptive, teachers cannot conduct item analysis and must rely on other tools provided with this assessment

Impact of This Decision

Implementing MAP district-wide will promote the district's strategic direction by providing better information about whether we are meeting our goals. Implementing MAP will provide more frequent student data that will inform instruction to improve student outcomes.

Many stakeholders within SPS – primarily students, teachers, and principals – will be impacted by this decision. In order to support you, we plan to prioritize assessment in planning professional development, the Summer Leadership Institute and cluster meetings. A design team comprising

principals and central office staff is creating the professional development for the implementation of MAP for the Summer Institute. We are also hiring, with grant funding, four Instructional Coaches focused solely on data and assessment to train school staff on how to administer the test and coach staff on how to use and interpret MAP data.

Your Instructional Directors will receive professional development on how to use MAP to track student progress and inform instruction; Directors will support you in using MAP as a tool to meet your school's goals. All of this support will be designed to minimize the impact on school staff and provide professional development to allow teachers to take advantage of MAP as a meaningful instructional tool. We will also work with you and your staff to understand how MAP implementation will affect library usage and how to best mitigate the impact.

You might also be wondering how MAP fits in with the valuable work you have already done to establish Data Teams and Professional Learning Communities (PLCs). Many schools have implemented Data Teams or other forms of PLCs over the last two years to study and take action on student work and assessment data. MAP provides a framework through which you can continue Data Teams; you will receive real-time student data to track student progress on standards three times per year. Going forward, if you feel you have a successful Data Team or PLC structure in place already, MAP can serve as one more "tool" in your "toolbox." On the other hand, if you need support in strengthening your Data Team or PLC structure, our professional development department can provide you with technical assistance or you can use MAP as a building block for strengthening your school's practice around using data to inform instruction. Please discuss these options with Brad and Jessica when they contact you.

It is my intention that as a result of MAP implementation, we will have more accurate data to measure and accelerate student growth and reduction of the education gap. We will be successful if, by 2010, you and your teachers have received full professional development on how to use MAP and are actively using it to make decisions that inform instruction and positively impact academic achievement. Please let us know what you need, especially if we aren't meeting your needs during implementation.

Next Steps

I look forward to working with you to make this a valuable experience for everyone, and I thank you in advance for the time and energy we will need to build our assessment system up-front in order to maximize the long-term impact. Please work collaboratively with Brad and Jessica when they contact you in the next few weeks. You will also have time to talk about this issue with your Instructional Director at the next Cluster meeting on May 19. If you have any questions about MAP in the meantime, please contact Jessica at 2-0164 or jedebarros@seattleschools.org, or you can send questions or concerns to me at magoodloe@seattleschools.org.

APPENDIX: ASSESSMENT STAKEHOLDERS (Updated 6/9/09)

The members of the preK-12 Assessment Strategy project team are:

- Brad Bernatek (Executive Sponsor)
- Jessica de Barros (Project Manager)
- Eric Caldwell, Instructional Technologist
- Dan Coles, Literacy Manager
- Anna-Maria de la Fuente, Math Manager
- Laura Garcia, Early Learning Manager
- Brian Lindquist/Olga Addae, SEA
- John MacDonald, Special Education Psychologist
- Gordon Prinster, Special Education Psychologist
- Nancy Steers, Assessment Director
- Gosia Stone, Bilingual Coach
- Cathy Thompson, Director, Curriculum & Instruction
- Bob Vaughan, Advanced Learning Manager

Principals involved in the MAP pilot in 2008-09 are:

- Susan McCloskey (BF Day)
- Joanne Bowers (North Beach)
- Jill Hudson (Madison)
- Jeff Clark (Denny)
- Andhra Lutz (Mercer)
- Katie Cryan-Leary (Hamilton)
- Robert Gary, Jr. (Rainier Beach)
- Princess Shareef (Cleveland)
- John Boyd (Chief Sealth)
- Anne Fitzpatrick (Kimball)
- Beverly Raines (Brighton)

Principals involved in one-on-one outreach include:

- Kimberly Kinzer (Daniel Bagley)
- Justin Baeder (Olympic View)
- Zoe Jenkins (Olympic Hills)
- Pat Hunter (Maple)
- Ellen Punyon (Dearborn Park)
- Ted Howard (Garfield)
- Jo Shapiro (McGilvra)
- Jennifer Wiley (Franklin)
- Richard Mellish (Schmitz Park)
- Susan McCloskey (BF Day)
- Joanne Bowers (North Beach)
- Jill Hudson (Madison)
- Jeff Clark (Denny)
- Andhra Lutz (Mercer)
- Katie Cryan-Leary (Hamilton)
- Robert Gary, Jr. (Rainier Beach)
- Princess Shareef (Cleveland)
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