



Our students will shape and lead the future

News release

Oct. 13, 2015

Everett Public Schools students outperform the state – again!

- *The trend – a higher percentage of students meeting standard – continues on new tests*
- *Two years of proactive planning built an infrastructure and system enabling students to demonstrate their best work*
- *Having these additional computers in classrooms illustrated the learning power of more students having more access to technology for longer periods of time*
- *11,800 district students took the new English Language Arts test on a computer last spring*
- *10,500 took the new math test on a computer*

The results

In spring 2015, Everett Public Schools students took the new Smarter Balanced tests for the first time. And for the first time, students in the district and across the state took these state tests on computers instead of with paper and pencils.

Experts predicted the 2015 Smarter Balanced assessment results would be gloomy. Some worried that students would fumble using computers for the first time on high stakes tests. Some felt there had not been enough time to prepare students for new tests that measure how well students' knowledge and skills met the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

Contrary to predictions, the district's test results demonstrated more district students met or exceeded standard than the percent of students who met or exceeded standard across the state. "In some instances, the percentages of our students at or above standard exceeded by double digits the percentages of the state," noted Superintendent Gary Cohn who credits school board and staff foresight and the systematic effort to have everything ready for students to be successful.

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District SBA results compared to state

	ELA	Math	Science
Grade			
3	+ 8.6	+ 5.8	
4	+ 9.7	+ 7.8	
5	+12.5	+ 8.0	
6	+14.2	+ 6.4	
7	+15.5	+ 9.6	
8	+15.3	+10.2	+12.9
10	+ 0.5		+ 5.1
11	+18.0	+18.0	
12	+11.3	+ 8.6	

Once again,
Everett's students
outperform
the rest of the
state!



The story behind those results

“We knew there would be challenges,” explained Dr. Catherine Matthews, the district’s director of curriculum and assessment. “We identified the challenges and took action to overcome them. Some of those challenges were purely technical; others involved getting people ready for a big change.”



For example, “District teachers began working with the CCSS two years before the new tests would measure how well students met them,” noted Dr. Joyce Stewart, the district’s associate superintendent overseeing teaching and learning.

The new tests were more rigorous to measure the higher expectations of the new standards. We built in time and ways for teachers to learn about the standards and to design instruction that supported students’ learning. Our teachers and principals have been champions in this work. They’ve been working together, learning together, visiting classrooms and evaluating and coaching each other to help students learn. Today’s students must have more

skills and greater knowledge to compete as adults in our global society.”

Ensuring that every student could take the tests on a computer required many more computers. “We needed more computers than we already had on hand to be able to launch a carefully planned, phased schedule that provided enough time for students to take their required tests,” explained Ken Toyn, the district’s information systems and technology director.

A year before the tests were administered, the school board recognized the need for more computers and authorized capital funds to be used to purchase 3,500 Chromebooks. “In April 2014, Chromebooks were relatively new technology,” Toyn adds. “By September we delivered them to classrooms so teachers and students had several months of “hands on” time, and to move them from classroom to classroom so teachers and students had opportunities to become familiar with them.”

Toyn’s staff also tested every classroom in each of the district’s 26 schools to ensure the network connection was strong and stable. “The teachers were getting ready; we had enough computers and a workable test schedule; now we needed to ensure the network would be failsafe so students could demonstrate their learning with no technical glitches,” said Toyn.

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Parents naturally had questions about how well students would do with new technology and new tests. Matthews and her team designed a road show so parents and other adults could experience sample tests at different grade levels using the Chromebooks. In more than 75 sessions from fall 2014 through spring 2015, Matthews led groups of adults through Chromebook basics and sample Smarter Balanced test questions – at multiple grade levels.

The vast majority of parents were reassured after one of Matthews' sessions. "Once they knew how much planning and preparation the district had done to help students succeed on the tests, the better they felt." Matthews also noted parents enjoyed getting their hands on the machines their children were using. "Some even brought students with them to the sessions, and we saw students coaching parents about how to use the Chromebooks."

Another big learning came from this experience. "The Chromebooks were a huge success," notes Cohn. "Their infusion with existing computers put the power of learning through technology into the hands of more teachers and more students. Although the reason for adding more computers was to prepare for the new Smarter Balanced assessments, teachers and students – and parents, too – quickly saw the power of greater access to computing devices."

This experience has generated school board and community discussions about ways to make technology more accessible for more students for longer parts of the day. Students and teachers are realizing that computers must be a part of students' learning every day --like they are part of engineers', and nurses', and programmers', and assemblers', and office staff's jobs—and not just when a state test rolls around.

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