



Weston Public Schools
Office of the Assistant Superintendent
of Curriculum & Instruction
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MEMORANDUM

To: William S. McKersie, Ph.D., Superintendent
Date: September 7, 2018
Subject: Smarter Balanced Assessments Results

On September 6, the Connecticut State Department of Education (CSDE) publicly released the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBA) results from the spring 2018 test administration. There are three key positive headlines for Weston's results:

1. Overall, the percentage of students in Weston achieving *Level 3 and above* in grades 3-8 in ELA increased by 4.7% when compared to 2017. In math, our scores also improved by 1.2%.
2. The percentage of students achieving *Level 3 and above* at each grade level either increased or was maintained in both ELA and math when compared to 2017, with the exception of sixth grade math (See appendix A).
3. A significantly higher percentage of eighth grade students achieved *Level 3 and above* in both ELA (81%) and math (83%) when compared to their performance as seventh graders in 2017.

Background

All students in grades 3-8 were expected to take the SBA in ELA and Math, as required by State and Federal law. This was the fourth administration of the SBA since its inception. The 2018 SBA consisted of computer-adaptive tests designed to measure achievement in relation to the Connecticut Common Core Standards for ELA and Math. There was a performance task component for math, but not for ELA.

There are four achievement levels for the SBA:

- Level 4 Exceeds the achievement standard
- Level 3 Meets the achievement standard
- Level 2 Approaching the achievement standard
- Level 1 Does not meet the achievement standards

Results

- The percentage of students scoring at *Level 3 and above* in grades 3-8 in Weston was:
 - ELA: 79.1 % (State: 55.3 %)
 - Math: 74.7 % (State: 46.6 %)
- Weston's overall growth in percentage points for students at *Level 3 and above* as compared to last year was:
 - ELA: 4.7 % increase (State: 1.1 % increase)
 - Math: 1.2 % increase (State: 1.1 % increase)

- Attachment A: The SBA trend comparison chart provides a snapshot of growth over time in ELA and Math. This chart is intended to be read starting with a grade in 2015 and following the cohort through 2018. For example, the results in grade 3 for ELA in 2015 were 69 % achieving *Level 3 and above* in comparison to 76 % in grade 4 for 2016, 78 % in grade 5 in 2017, and 77% in grade 6 in 2018. All four data points are shown in orange to indicate that it was the same cohort of students.
- Attachment B: The enclosed District Reference Group (DRG) “A” charts for ELA and math list the results for the eight districts in our comparison group. It shows the percentage of students scoring at *Level 3 and above* in ELA and Math for 2018, and where Weston ranks in relation to the DRG. The DRG A and State averages are noted as well as additional points of reference.
- Attachment C: The CSDE reports the average percentage of growth targets achieved by district. This metric evaluates the amount of growth made by the same students from year-to-year based on the scale scores. These results only include students for whom there were results for both 2017 and 2018. This is referred to as a matched cohort comparison. It does not include students who were new to the district in 2018. Weston’s average percentage of target achieved was 68.2% for ELA and 77.3% for math. These percentages are similar our DRG A counterparts.

Discussion

SBA is one of multiple measures we use to monitor student achievement in ELA and Math. These results serve as a point of comparison as we look at the change in student performance (growth) over time. With the 2017-18 scores, we now have four years of cohort data to monitor student performance since the inception of the SBA.

Mathematics

The 14% increase in achievement for eighth grade math is an outstanding improvement and one that we can trace back to some very specific strategies employed by the teachers. Greg Ferro and Carla Howard, in collaboration with Janine Russo, embedded SBA-type problem solving into instruction and assessments throughout the school year. This was accomplished with little impact on the existing curriculum or the classroom environment.

On August 24, Greg, Carla, and Janine led a professional development workshop for the middle school math department in which they shared their approach and findings. After hearing their presentation, the department made a commitment to implement the following strategies for the 2018-19 school year.

- Include at least one SBA-type question per formal assessment (quiz or test).
- Embed at least three SBA-type problems/activities per unit in daily instruction, classwork and warm ups.
- Strategically administer three Interim Assessment Blocks (IABs) throughout the course of the year following aligned units. IABs are brief formative assessments, or dipsticks, used to inform classroom instruction.

At this same meeting, we discussed a highly unusual trend with the sixth grade cohort. As these students have progressed from third to sixth grade their SBA scores have steadily declined each year from 83% achieving *level 3 and above* in 2015 to 58 % achieving *level 3 and above* in 2018. This represents a 25% decrease over a four-year period. We have been examining a variety of factors to determine root causes; however, we have not yet pinpointed the factor(s) that may be

contributing to this decline. We have a team looking more closely into the individual student results to better understand the trend and determine next steps.

English/Language Arts

We are seeing a very positive trend with the ELA scores. For grades 4, 7 and 8, the percentage of students scoring at *Level three and above* increased significantly when compared to the previous year.

- Grade 4 – 81% (+11%)
- Grade 7 – 83% (+6%)
- Grade 8 – 81% (+9%)

Like math, these gains can be traced back to specific strategies employed by the ELA and social studies teachers. It is important to stress that teachers have not narrowed the curriculum or used traditional test prep to achieve these results. They have used the results of the IABs to inform instruction. For example, teachers in grades 7 and 8 learned that students weren't properly embedding evidence in supporting their claims, so teachers in both English and social studies placed additional emphasis on this throughout the year.

Next Steps

Outlined here are several approaches we will use in analyzing the results:

- Review scores in the same grade from year to year (e.g. compare grade 3 scores from 2017 to grade 3 scores in 2018). This approach looks at different groups of students.
- A more useful approach is to examine achievement results for a particular grade in one year and compare it to the next grade the following year (e.g. compare grade 3 scores in 2015 to grade 4 results in 2016 to grade 5 scores in 2017 and to grade 6 scores in 2018). One must keep in mind that students migrate in and out of a cohort from year to year. The enclosed color-coded trend comparison chart represents mostly the same students, but inherent in the data are some mismatches.
- A more precise approach follows each student from year-to-year. This information is obtained by mining the data to examine each individual student's performance annually. This is a time intensive effort, but one worthy of engaging in to better understand trends in student achievement.
- Finally, it is important to disaggregate data by subgroups to ensure that all students are meeting with success. (e.g. gender, special education, English language learners, free-reduced lunch, race/ethnicity)

All of these approaches are used to examine student performance. Our administrators, curriculum instructional leaders, data teams, and departments will be working together to analyze the SBA, and other measures. My team will prepare a standardized testing report to be presented to the Board at the October 2018 Board of Education meeting. It will include additional information related to the SBA results.