



Arizona Department of Education
Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Diane M. Douglas

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Sally Stewart
Sally.Stewart@azed.gov
602-542-5072

Superintendent Diane Douglas Supports Assessment Options for Arizona Schools

(Phoenix, Ariz. – March 16, 2015) – Today Superintendent of Public Instruction Diane Douglas said she supports allowing local school districts and charter schools to select one of several statewide achievement tests to administer to their students.

“A one-size-fits-all approach to state testing is not the best way to truly measure student success,” the Superintendent said. “As a national leader in school choice, Arizona is better suited to a system that allows schools to select a test based on how they teach their students.”

House Bill 2180, sponsored by House Education Chairman Paul Boyer, would establish a set of statewide achievement tests that would be available to schools beginning in the 2015-2016 school year. Each test would be nationally recognized.

“As a teacher myself, I don’t want my curriculum or any other teacher’s curriculum to be driven by a test or bureaucrats in Washington, D.C.,” said Representative Boyer. “I know first-hand that a single statewide test in every Arizona school does not help students or teachers.”

Superintendent Douglas earlier released the potential federal actions regarding changing standards or assessments. “Despite opponents saying that the standards and tests are Arizona based, the fact is that the federal government has threatened other states with a wide range of punishments. For Arizona, those punishments would range from no cost to around \$600 million.”

Next week, the Superintendent and her staff are meeting in Washington, D.C. with the federal administration, the Congressional Delegation, and the actual authors of Common Core to discuss giving the state flexibility to make improvements in both standards and in testing.

“Our initial discussions have gone well,” she said. “We are helping the federal government to understand that Common Core will not be updated, so that annual review and improvement is necessary. As those officials really understand our goals, they may be willing to remove considering penalties for our approach.”

“For testing,” the Superintendent continued, “it is the same issue. We are not trying to do away with testing, but to provide meaningful tests.

More

Options 1-1-1

“Our assessment team did an amazing job putting together a test in 21 weeks,” she said. “However, we have the following problems:

- 1) The test was meant to be taken online, and yet only 40 percent will be taking the test online, and of those, many are having problems in testing and had to spend money on additional equipment.
- 2) The test is a departure from the former bubble system, but many districts have not had time to train teachers or students on the new test methodology. As a result, it is likely scores will be much lower due to learning a new test system, and exacerbate the division between districts with more technology and training funding and those with tighter operating budgets;
- 3) In the second year, testing will show great improvement, not because kids have learned more, but because districts and children have learned how to implement the test itself;
- 4) The written test, taken by 60 percent, does not fully match up with the online test, so scores will not be wholly comparable; and
- 5) Both students and teachers will feel the strain of “failing” a test simply because it is new and different.

“As a result of these concerns, I support either allowing each LEA to select a test as in Representative Boyer’s bill, or failing that, that each LEA be allowed to vote through their governing board on whether or not to test this month and April.

“I have directed my assessment staff to work with districts that will have the most problems with AzMERIT testing to help ensure that children and staff are not subjected to undue stress,” she said. “When AIMS was first implemented, we had to spend a year going around the state putting out fires. The difference between AIMS and AzMERIT is even greater. Regardless of the quality of the test, rushing into it is bound to create additional problems.”

Superintendent Douglas is committed to working with education officials at all levels of government to mitigate any potential impacts that could result from this change in policy. She will meet with U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan later this month to discuss this and other issues. As with establishing a continuous standards improvement process, she will discuss with officials the testing concerns so that Arizona can avoid being penalized for taking reasonable steps to ensure a quality testing system has ample time to be properly implemented.

End