Will This Be on the Test?

As Teaching Goes Deeper, So Will Testing

Taking standardized tests every year is routine for students across the globe. Now, in what is being described as “a sea change” in education, California’s public schools, along with those in 45 other states, are transitioning to new content standards and “smarter balanced assessments” – the tests that measure whether or not students are learning the new content standards.

Testing, Testing …

For the last decade, a substantial set of tests, known as “STAR,” have been an annual event in public school classrooms. These tests are the basic tools used to measure progress and are required by the state and federal governments. The results do not affect students’ personal grades but are an important way to find out – on top of the regular classroom tests – if students are mastering a range of subjects including math, reading, and social studies.

Each individual student’s test result in aggregate makes up the score (known as the Academic Performance Index or API) that schools earn each year, and in turn each school’s API comprises the district’s overall score. In California, each school and school district is expected to see test scores grow from year to year.

One problem noted by educators is that the standards set for students to achieve on state tests vary from state to state. Another is that the multiple-choice, fill-in-the-bubble tests students have been taking don’t fully reflect students’ understanding of the subject matter.

¿Estará esto en el examen?

Conforme se profundiza en la enseñanza, lo mismo pasará en los exámenes

En todo el mundo presentar exámenes estándar cada año es una continúa en la página 3

ARE THERE GENETICALLY MODIFIED ORGANISMS IN MY SNACK? Lincoln High student Raymond Poon works with student Reeda Abdelwahhab as they complete the final step in an experiment to determine if certain common snack foods include the DNA from genetically modified organisms (GMOs). The school’s Biotech and Green Academies hosted the lab this spring. Green Academy student Abdelwahhab learned some new lab skills and Poon and his classmates in the Biotechnology Academy gained valuable data for their annual participation in the international iGEM (International Genetically Engineered Machine) synthetic biology competition at Stanford and MIT next fall. Green Academy students made a presentation on the results - and discussed the affect genetically modified organism in food might have on humans and the earth - to their peers at school on Earth Day.
Where are They Going?

Thousands of SFUSD grad students are headed to college. We asked a few of them about their plans for the future.

Ana Zuniga / SF International High School

“I want to become a lawyer. I knew this when I came to this country and had to go to a center for minors because I didn’t have papers. A lawyer helped me get things straightened out and she really motivated me. My advice to anyone who wants to go to college? Never give up on your dreams. Keep moving if you want to get ahead in life. I’m going to SF State this fall.”

Ely Orquiza / Burton High School

“I’ve known since my freshman year I wanted to study theater in college. I think theater is a way to nurture a compassionate community. A lot of teachers helped me figure out what I needed to do to advocate for myself along the way. I’m going to UC Berkeley this fall.”

Daniela Ponce / Marshall High School

“I work at UCSF National Center of Excellence in Women’s Health where I learn health and leadership skills, so now I want to not only get a degree in Communication but also in Public Health. I was also on my school’s Mock Trial Team where I developed knowledge about the law, questioning techniques, and oral advocacy skills. I’m headed to SF State with a full ride this fall.”

Demondre Harrison / Balboa High School

“At the beginning of the year I had a lot of obstacles, and I got through it. That’s when I knew I wanted to get a degree in Communication & Public Speaking and become an entrepreneur and motivational speaker. I’m going to Clark Atlanta University in Georgia because it’s near Morehouse and Spellman University and also near CNN where I might get an internship.”

Abby Paz / Ida B Wells Continuation High School

“I got into Cal State East Bay, and Cal State Monterey Bay. I’m waiting to hear from SF State, where I want to go because it’s so big and I have connections to people there. A few years ago I didn’t think I’d be going to a four-year college, but once I started getting good grades here at Ida B Wells I wanted to aim higher.”

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so that when students transition from one topic to the next, or from one grade level to the next, there is shared understanding about the skills and knowledge students have gained. Up until now, what students should know at certain grade levels has varied greatly among states.

Now, California is one of 45 states that has adopted a shared set of standards, called “Common Core.” For example, what a fourth grader is expected to master for reading skills in Massachusetts will be the same as that of a fourth grader in Mississippi.

Even with the new Common Core standards, there is still a lot of important decision making that require education professionals - teachers, principals, superintendents and others - to decide how the standards are to be met. In San Francisco, teachers will continue to devise lesson plans and tailor instruction to the needs of the students in their classrooms. A lesson on how to measure the circumference of a circle in a Mission district school classroom may be different than one created for students in a school classroom in Brooklyn, but all students will have to know how to do it.

The Future of Standardized Testing

Today, a typical standardized math test is given with paper & pencil, and questions are multiple choice only. By contrast, tests on a computer and will require students to actually solve math problems, and include their reasoning in writing, along with some multiple choice questions.

In all subject matters tested, the new standardized tests, known as “Smarter Balanced Assessments,” will include extended student answers and actual tasks for the student to perform during the test to show critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

“These new assessment methods will do a much better job of getting the student to show us that he or she really understands the material,” says John Burke, who supervises standardized testing in the school district’s Achievement Assessments office.

Burke says one major improvement will be something called “computer adaptive testing,” which means the questions a student answers will branch out in different directions based on how he or she responds to each one.

“This goes much deeper into what the student does or does not know and gives us a much more robust picture of where the student is in learning the material,” says Burke. “It just goes way beyond the multiple-choice of today’s STAR tests.”

And, with the more in-depth tests, school districts are allowed 12 weeks to assess all students, instead of the current five-week window they have now.

Burke says the Smarter Balanced testing dovetails very well with SFUSD’s relatively new Common Learning Assessments, which are shorter tests given to students two to three times a year for teachers to gauge and adjust their teaching for that year.

When is the Test?

SFUSD is preparing to start the new testing system at all schools in the spring of 2015. For a few years the tests will be paper only as the district ramps up to all-computerized testing.

For more information on Common Core Standards and Smarter Balanced Assessments, go to www.corestandards.org.

To see a three-minute video overview of Common Core Standards, and to learn more about SFUSD’s timeline for implementing the Common Core, go to www.sfusd.edu/commoncore.

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San Francisco to walk to school! Walk to School Day 2012. (Oct 3)

Quinoa Chowder: Ida B Wells High culinary students prepare to feed 50 guests at their annual fun run this Sunday. (Oct 26)

Howlin’ and runnin’! Join Claire Lilenthal students for their annual fun run this Sunday. (Oct 26)

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Viewpoints

Board of Education President
Rachel Norton

Five or six years ago, even before I became a member of the school board, I started hearing buzz about "community schools" as a strategy for supporting achievement of less-advantaged students. What is a community school? It’s a school that offers non-educational services to its students and families—services like health care, English classes, job training, computer access, food pantries—really anything that will assist families in being better partners for their child’s education.

The San Francisco Unified School District has in recent years embraced the community schools strategy for a group of schools serving some of our highest-need students. With the guidance of New Day for Learning and later our own Director of Community Schools, we have brought in community school coordinators who are responsible for a variety of parent and community engagement efforts. These coordinators might assist teachers and afterschool providers in aligning their activities so that learning happens throughout the day; they might make home visits to help parents have a better understanding of how they can support their child’s learning and how they can be involved with school; or they might develop partnerships with social service agencies that can provide mental health services for students or parenting classes for the adults who care for them.

The district’s efforts have garnered national recognition. Last month, one of the first SFUSD schools to embrace the community schools strategy—Hillcrest Elementary in the City’s Excelsior District—was honored with a 2013 Community Schools Award for Excellence by the Coalition for Community Schools.

As your superintendent I get the opportunity to see learning throughout the entire school system—principals learning, teachers learning, and, most importantly, students learning.

As the 2012-2013 school year winds down, I wanted to take a moment to reflect with you about some of the many great examples of learning I saw throughout SFUSD this year.

I’ve visited classrooms where children who only speak Cantonese at home are developing proficiency in two languages at school so they can maintain and develop the language they learned for the first several years of their lives while becoming proficient in English. I sat with a 3rd grader as she read Chinese characters and English and understood both perfectly. I’ve met with and been inspired by students, parents, and teachers talking about how they’ve worked together to make their schools better. How they love what they’re learning and how they’re learning it.

I’ve been with our principals and teachers as they analyze the results of their students’ common learning assessments, benchmark tests that students take a few times a year that help provide real time feedback to schools about what’s working and not working in terms of students learning important content. They then use these results and other examples of students’ work to plan lessons together.

Now, with slightly more stable funding, we’re investing as much as we can in teachers’ learning because we know that is critical to our student’s success. Next year we’ll have more literacy specialists at school sites coaching teachers in effectively using a balanced approach to teaching reading and writing. We’ll have science, technology and math specialists working with classroom teachers to demonstrate ways to equip our students with a solid foundation in the content that is increasingly essential to our students’ future opportunities in life.

Summer vacation may be about to begin for some of you. I would be remiss if I didn’t say—keep learning! See you next fall.

Superintendent
Richard A. Carranza

I am an educator for many reasons. One big reason: I love to learn and I love to see other people learn. I love to see children’s eyes light up with pride when they grasp a new concept. I love to see teachers sharing ideas with each other to create a learning experience that will really reach all of their students and help them progress to the next level.

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2013 Fall Calendar

Monday, August 19, 2013
First Day of School

Monday, September 2
Labor Day (no school)

Monday, October 14
Columbus/Indigenous People’s Day/El Dia de la Raza (no school)

Monday, November 11
Veterans Day Observance (no school)

Wednesday, November 27 – Friday November 29
Thanksgiving Recess (no school)

December 23 - January 3, 2014
Winter Break (no school)
Bryant Elementary Parents Learn Together

Alexis Alexander is an African-American parent with a Chinese-American son in kindergarten at Bryant Elementary, a school where the majority of students and families are Spanish speaking.

“I felt jittery when I first arrived,” says Alexander. But she says the school’s staff soon put her at ease.

“English- or Spanish-speaking, they make you feel welcome,” says Alexander. More importantly, she adds, “I just feel like they really wrap around your kid. They go above and beyond.”

“My son has been hooked on Bryant Elementary since day one.”

“Fostering relationships and building trust between families and the school provides a strong foundation for academic success for students,” says parent liaison Claudia DeLarios Moran.

The Bryant Elementary School staff have worked together to establish a set of support systems possible when a school actually has adequate resources and a focused strategy.

“Fostering relationships and building trust between families and the school provides a strong foundation for academic success for students.”

- Bryant Elementary Parent Liaison Claudia DeLarios Moran

Federal grants giving school a boost

Bryant’s Academic Performance Index grew by 30 points last year with all student subgroups meeting the State’s growth targets.

Bryant is one of nine schools in the district to have received a three-year federal grant known as “SIG” (School Improvement Grant) to help turn around schools with a history of low academic achievement.

Long before the SIG funds were announced, SFUSD funded schools have had the opportunity to see what is possible when a school actually has adequate resources and a focused strategy.

“Fostering relationships and building trust between families and the school provides a strong foundation for academic success for students.”

- Bryant Elementary Parent Liaison Claudia DeLarios Moran

Now work here, I see the difference. I see the way it should be,” says DeLarios Moran.

Bryant Elementary Parent Liaison Claudia DeLarios Moran shows the bulletin board where parent education opportunities are posted. Classes for parents are offered on site every day of the week.

Would you like to acknowledge the work of an SF public school teacher or other employee? Visit sfusd.edu/rave