

WMRSD prepares for new state tests, required in 2015

BY EDITH TUCKER
etucker@salmonpress.com

WHITEFIELD — WMRSD is gearing up to ready students for the new Smarter Balanced tests, designed to assess how well students are meeting the state's new Common Core Curriculum standards.

This spring some students in WMRSD class-

WMRSD

(continued from Page A1)

rooms have been or will be taking Smarter Balanced tests as part of the consortium's field testing effort, reports assistant superintendent Melissa Keenan, Ed.D., in her April 24 memo to the school board.

"In preparation for this test, teachers are beginning to do some in-class exercises in grades 3 to 11 as a way of introducing students to

ing the juniors had to take part in," he writes. "The vast majority of us felt like the test was extremely challenging. One of the essential things to keep in mind is that confidence is everything.

"The current junior class does not feel confident about their performance on this drastically different test. With this outlook on the test, next year's juniors — now sophomores — are already worrying about the test.

"I think that one of the many things that needs to happen is to have the school promote a general sense of confidence about the exam to all who are taking it next year," LaLonde continues. "I truly feel that only a little academic preparation is needed to do well on the test; the content was certainly challenging, but not out of our league, so to speak.

"A complementary process should accompany the academic preparation, making students as comfortable as they can be before they take the actual assessment. One suggestion that immediately comes to mind is getting students more trained with the interface. While it is generally easy to navigate, there were still many students who had issues using it.

"Overall, this is obviously a good change for the District," he writes. "From my perspective, let's just be sure the students who take it are well prepared enough in all areas of the exam so that it accurately reflects the academic preparedness of the students."

rooms have been or will be taking Smarter Balanced tests as part of the consortium's field testing effort, reports assistant superintendent Melissa Keenan, Ed.D., in her April 24 memo to the school board.

"In preparation for this test, teachers are beginning to do some in-class exercises in grades 3 to 11 as a way of introducing students to

ing the juniors had to take part in," he writes. "The vast majority of us felt like the test was extremely challenging. One of the essential things to keep in mind is that confidence is everything.

"The current junior class does not feel confident about their performance on this drastically different test. With this outlook on the test, next year's juniors — now sophomores — are already worrying about the test.

"I think that one of the many things that needs to happen is to have the school promote a general sense of confidence about the exam to all who are taking it next year," LaLonde continues. "I truly feel that only a little academic preparation is needed to do well on the test; the content was certainly challenging, but not out of our league, so to speak.

"A complementary process should accompany the academic preparation, making students as comfortable as they can be before they take the actual assessment. One suggestion that immediately comes to mind is getting students more trained with the interface. While it is generally easy to navigate, there were still many students who had issues using it.

"Overall, this is obviously a good change for the District," he writes. "From my perspective, let's just be sure the students who take it are well prepared enough in all areas of the exam so that it accurately reflects the academic preparedness of the students."

The Smarter Balanced Assessments website describes the tests. "The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium is developing a system of valid, reliable, and fair next-generation assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards

the new Smarter Balanced test items," Keenan writes. "We believe that taking the Smarter Balanced test will be like a Marathon, and in order to do well, we believe that students must be taught not only the content and thinking skills required to be successful, but also the endurance and

WMRSD, PAGE A11

(CCSS) in English language arts (ELA)-literacy and mathematics for grades 3 to 8 and 11," it reads. "The system — which includes both summative assessments for accountability purposes and optional interim assessments for instructional use — will use computer adaptive testing technologies to the greatest extent possible to provide meaningful feedback and actionable data that teachers and other educators can use to help students succeed.

"Smarter Balanced assessments will go beyond multiple-choice questions to include extended response and technology-enhanced items, as well as performance tasks that allow students to demonstrate critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.

"Performance tasks challenge students to apply their knowledge and skills to respond to complex real-world problems. They can best be described as collections of questions and activities that are coherently connected to a single theme or scenario.

"These activities are meant to measure capacities such as depth of understanding, writing and research skills, and complex analysis, which cannot be adequately assessed with traditional assessment questions. The performance tasks will be taken on a computer (but will not be computer adaptive) and will take one to two class periods to complete."

"Smarter Balanced capitalizes on the precision and efficiency of computer adaptive testing (CAT). This approach represents a significant improvement over traditional paper-and-pencil assessments used in many states today, providing more accurate scores for all students across the full range of the achievement continuum."