

South Dakota Releases New Student Assessment Test Results

BY DIRK LAMMERS
 Associated Press

SIoux FALLS — South Dakota students performed better than expected on new, more rigorous assessment tests, although less than half of them reached levels considered proficient, state education officials said Monday.

The Smarter Balance tests are designed to evaluate whether students are on track to be college ready, said Melody Schopp, secretary of the state Department of Education. Scores from tests given in the spring show the percentage of South Dakota students in grades 3-8 and 11 at or above Level 3 "proficient" was 49.5 percent in English language arts and 41.3 percent in math.

Schopp said the results are in line with other states using the Smarter Balance tests, which include Idaho, Missouri, Washington, Oregon, West Virginia, Delaware and California.

"This assessment was definitely more rigorous and it was more meaningful, because it measured things we've never measured before," she said. "Students were asked to demonstrate real-world skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, writing and citing specific evidence as they went through the assessment."

Mary McCorkle, president of the union representing teachers in the state, said the results demonstrate the work going on in classrooms to prepare students with higher-level thinking skills.

"The fact that our students did better than predicted in the first year is a positive," said McCorkle, president of the South Dakota Education Association. "We're pleased with that."

Department officials presented the statewide results to the Board of Education during its Monday meeting in Watertown. The state's full 2015 Report Card is scheduled to be released Tuesday.

Abby Javurek-Humig,

director of the state Department of Education's division of assessment and accountability, said the full report will identify the top performing school districts and those in need of additional support. It also will look at student attendance, as studies show those who miss more than 6 percent of classes face significant learning gaps, she said.

Schopp said the majority of South Dakota schools fall into a mid-range for performance, but there are outliers on both ends. She said officials over the next year will look at factors impacting how students performed in some of those lower-scoring schools.

The Smarter Balance assessments replace the previously used Dakota STEP tests, and the first-year scores will provide a new baseline for student achievement, Schopp said, adding that she expects scores to rise in coming years. The 11th grade tests provide an added benefit of assessing whether high school

students are ready to attend post-secondary schools or are in need of remedial coursework to help them catch up.

South Dakota in August received a one-year waiver renewal from provisions of the federal No Child Left Behind Act, though the U.S. Department of Education put the state on high-risk status because of "serious problems with its guidelines for teacher and principal evaluation and support systems."

Schopp said the new test results will not be used to evaluate individual teachers.

McCorkle said that the South Dakota Commission on Teaching and Learning partnership is continuing discussion on that federal status, but she believes the state has met the U.S. Department of Education's guidelines. She said South Dakota's teacher effectiveness system is good for schools and students and good for building professional practice.

Parks On Register Of Historic Places

SIoux FALLS (AP) — Two Sioux Falls parks have been added to the National Register of Historic Places.

Terrace Park and the Japanese Gardens are now part of a list with more than 80,000 properties selected by the National Park Service. The thousands of sites are considered "worthy of preservation."

The parks and recreation department in Sioux Falls says the city purchased the 52 acres for Terrace Park for \$15,000 in 1916. An outdoor amphitheater, a series of terraces and other features were added beginning in 1922, and an aquatic center was built in 1994.

The Japanese Gardens were constructed in the late 1920s and early 1930s. Today, the area features exotic flowers, arbors and pagodas.

Earning a spot in the National Register is the first step toward eligibility for federal preservation tax credits.

Bosworth Appeals For Her License

PIERRE (AP) — Former Republican U.S. Senate candidate Annette Bosworth says she's appealing a state board's decision to revoke her medical license after her May felony conviction for election law violations.

Bosworth said she filed her appeal in circuit court Monday. Bosworth also asked that she be able to have her license while she appeals the revocation.

Bosworth is also appealing her conviction on six counts each of perjury and filing false documents.

An attorney for medical board staff argued during this month's revocation proceedings that Bosworth's conduct was a threat to the public.

Bosworth says she loves being a doctor and hopes to be successful. She says she is working on the Pine Ridge Indian Reservation, where few doctors work, and wants to continue serving there.

Work Begins On New Hoven School

HOVEN (AP) — Construction is beginning this week on a new school in Hoven to replace one that was destroyed by fire in May 2014.

The school board last week accepted a \$5.1 million bid from Aberdeen-based Kyburz Carlson Construction, *The American News* reported. Insurance will cover the cost.

The high school in Hoven had stood for about 70 years before the fire that was caused by electrical problems in the attic above the gymnasium. Seventh-graders through seniors have been attending classes in a former hospital building since.

The new school in the northern South Dakota town of about 400 people is expected to be ready for the 2016-17 school year.

"Once they get the (building's) shell up, they can start working through the winter," Superintendent Bob Graham said. "If the weather cooperates, we'll be in nice shape."

The plan is to build a 19,000-square-foot addition onto the existing 33,000-square-foot elementary school. Upgrades to the existing building will include a sprinkler system and an air conditioning system for the gym.

"This will have all the facilities and amenities at the same location," architect Tom Hurlbert said. "It's an opportunity to make upgrades to both facilities and get more bang for the buck."

Blow Darts Hit Men In Separate Attacks

LINCOLN, Neb. (AP) — Two men have been struck by blow darts in separate Lincoln attacks.

The first attack occurred around 2:30 p.m. Saturday. Lincoln Police Capt. Mayde McGuire says a motorcyclist was struck in the chest by a 5-inch-long blow dart. The man told officers that three males in a gold car were responsible.

The second attack occurred around 3:45 p.m. Saturday, when a blow dart struck the back of one of a pedestrian's arms. He also told officers that his attackers were in a gold car. Both men refused medical treatment.

Death Penalty Foes Challenge 'Slanted' Ballot Language

BY GRANT SCHULTE
 Associated Press

LINCOLN, Neb. — Opponents of a campaign to reinstate Nebraska's death penalty argued in a new lawsuit Monday that ballot language drafted by the attorney general's office for the 2016 election is slanted in favor of death penalty supporters.

Nebraskans for Public Safety, which opposes capital punishment, asked a judge to declare that the wording is "unlawfully misleading" and must be changed. Last week, the group filed a lawsuit arguing that the measure is invalid because Gov. Pete Ricketts — who bankrolled a large part of the petition drive — wasn't listed as a sponsor.

The ballot language submitted by Republican Attorney General Doug Peterson informs voters that retaining the repeal law would eliminate capital punishment and change the "maximum" penalty for first-degree murder to life in prison.

Death penalty opponents say the word "maximum" is misleading because it incorrectly implies that first-degree murder convicts could face a lesser sentence than life in prison. The lawsuit in Lancaster County District Court asks a judge to rule that the ballot's title and explanatory statement are "unfairly slanted in favor of the referendum proponents."

"Nebraskans have respectful differences of opinion on the death penalty," said plaintiff Lyle Koenig, a death penalty opponent and private practice attorney in Beatrice. "However, I think we can agree that all voters deserve a fair explanation of what this vote is really about."

A spokeswoman for Peterson, who supports the death penalty, issued a statement defending the ballot language and noting that it was taken from a legislative amendment written by the Judiciary Committee, which unanimously supported the repeal bill.

"The Attorney General's office has

complied with its statutory duty to provide clear, fair and impartial ballot language," the statement said.

Lawmakers voted in May to abolish capital punishment, narrowly overruling Ricketts' veto. Shortly after the vote, supporters of the punishment formed the group Nebraskans for the Death Penalty and launched a statewide petition drive to undo the repeal. Ricketts had given \$200,000 to the effort as of July 31, making him the largest contributor.

Nebraskans for the Death Penalty announced in August that it had collected nearly 167,000 signatures — more than three times the minimum number needed to place the issue on the November 2016 ballot. Some counties are still verifying the signatures, but Secretary of State John Gale announced last week that petition circulators appear to have gathered enough signatures to suspend the repeal law until voters decide its fate.

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