

4J GRAPPLES WITH COMMON CORE AND SPECIAL-NEEDS STUDENTS

Late last month, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium estimated that nationally, only 33 percent of 11th grade students who took the math portion of the Smarter Balanced field test last spring, which Oregon students will take in 2015, were considered proficient or advanced, with the remaining 67 percent needing additional support to meet the standards. And for students with disabilities, the future is even murkier when it comes to addressing their particular needs.

As Eugene School District 4J ramps up its outreach on the Common Core-aligned Smarter Balanced standardized test, which will be administered in spring 2015, it's also keeping in mind the challenges that students with disabilities will face when taking this test. 4J is holding a parent information night to address the issue on Monday, Dec. 15.

"We felt we needed to take a deeper dive and provide

better information and support for those families with particular needs," says Kerry Delf, 4J communications coordinator.

Students with disabilities, either learning or physical, often require individual education programs (IEPs), which outline specifically how a child with special needs will reach targeted educational goals. As teachers over the past few years have shifted to new standards and prepared for a new standardized test, IEPs have also needed to shift to align with the standards.

Scott Pfaefflin, education administrator for 4J's Educational Support Services, says parents have asked specifically about students with disabilities, including how the switch to Smarter Balanced testing will affect graduation rates and how teachers might instruct special needs students differently with the changes.

Pfaefflin says a big change that parents need to know is semantics. Previously, students with disabilities have

received accommodations while testing, which could include scribes, printed-out tests and larger fonts. Now, these accommodations are called designated support. "Almost all the old test accommodations are available on this new test," says Pfaefflin, who will speak at the parent info night.

Sheila Thomas, a board member of KindTree-Autism Rocks, says there are pros and cons to the new testing and standards in terms of students with disabilities, and it will take time for the new system to smooth out the hitches.

"When writing an IEP, we really need to take a good look at the individual and how to address their needs," Thomas says. "Sometimes the Core Standards aren't appropriate for their futures, and sometimes they are. Then it's up to the team to tease all of that stuff out to make a quality program."

4J's parent information session is 5:30 to 7:30 pm Monday, Dec. 15, at 4J Education Center Auditorium, 200 N. Monroe St. — *Amy Schneider*

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— SHEILA THOMAS

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