

Tested: Students scratch heads over new assessments

Across the river, scores tumble, but administrators mostly pleased

By KATIE WILSON
EO Media Group

PACIFIC COUNTY, Wash. — The results of a new state test were released Monday, and south Pacific County’s two school districts reflect numbers seen across Washington’s 295 school districts: take any two students and probably only one of them met the state’s new standards. Still, State Superintendent Randy Dorn was pleased.

“Statewide results beat our predictions,” he said in a press conference held Aug. 17. “That says to me that students are capable of learning our new standards, which are designed to make sure students are ready for career and college.”

Though the numbers look bad, he said that actual student learning improved.

The tests are more demanding than previous state assessments, requiring strong comprehension and problem-solving skills, state educators say. This was the first year students in grades 3 through 8 and grades 10 and 11 took the Smarter Balanced Assessments for English Language Arts and math.

However, Naselle-Grays River Valley School District and the Long Beach Peninsula’s Ocean Beach School District conducted an earlier “field test” of the assessments to familiarize students with the types of questions, as well as the technology they would need to be comfortable using in order to answer the questions.

In general, most of OBSD’s students failed to meet the state standards for English and math. The sixth and 11th-grade students came in especially low. In sixth grade, only 24 of the 84 students enrolled (34.2 percent) met the English standard, and had the lowest percentage of students who met the math standard: only 11 students, or 15.9 percent, met that standard. In 11th grade, 30 students, or 42.8 percent of the 79 students enrolled, met the English standard and 28.9 percent (20 students) met the math standard.

Students in the smaller Naselle-Grays River School District, which typically shows up very well on state assessments, also mostly failed to meet state standards, and in 11th grade, only four students of 22 met state standards for English; only five met the math standards.

Other challenges

For Ocean Beach School District and others, the new tests weren’t the only challenge.

“We were in the testing



Amy Huntley/For EO Media Group
Eighth-grader Jessie Huntley got plenty of attention last spring as she helped with a trial of new computer tablet testing procedures and technology at Ilwaco (Wash.) Middle School. Karen Veeland looked on. Students have now taken the tests for real and results were reported Monday.

window and they (the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction) were sending us updates and changes,” said Amy Huntley, OBSD’s interventions, assessment and curriculum program coordinator. “There was information that we should have known in November that we found out in February.”

One thing OBSD didn’t have to worry about, though, was the technology.

“Because of our tech levy and our good tech department, we have a lot of our kids on the technology and, for the most part, they’re at

least comfortable,” Huntley said. “They know how to log in.”

Smarter Balanced Assessments unfold entirely on a screen, which means students must have at least basic computer skills to navigate their way through the tests.

After speaking to other districts’ assessment coordinators, Huntley knows the technology side of things was a big challenge elsewhere.

Also, other districts dealt with high numbers of students refusing to take the new tests this year. Some

students turned in parent or guardian-signed refusal forms; others simply skipped test day. OBSD, however, had very few refusals, Huntley said.

Going forward, Huntley said the test results show the district what it needs to emphasize and help students understand.

With the Smarter Balanced Assessments, “part of it’s an assessment issue and part of it is a ‘life is complicated’ issue,” she said. The tests — with questions that require longer, extended problem-solving work — demand an amount of perseverance that some students may not currently have or are struggling to develop, she explained.

It’s good that the tests ask this of students, Huntley added, “because life is full of that. We need to be teaching our kids that.”

But, she said, “Certainly it’s something that when they hit it on an assessment, if they don’t have that perseverance, they answer it incomplete, may not give it as much effort or they get frustrated and they give up.” Ultimately, Huntley says, the tests pointed out what the district might need to “layer on.”

Ocean Beach scores

In the other grades: • Of the 81 students enrolled in third grade in the 2014-15 school year, 41.8 percent met the state’s standard in English language

arts; 46.6 percent met the standard in math.

- In fourth grade, 52 percent, or 38 of the 78 students enrolled, met the English standard while 45.2 percent met the math standard.
- In fifth grade, 58.9 percent, or 43 of the 80 students enrolled, met the English standard; 32.8 percent met the math standard.
- In seventh grade, 32 students of 89 — about 40 percent — met the English standard and 32 met the math standard.
- In eighth grade, 54 percent — 38 students of 76 — met the English standard while 39 percent met the math standard.

Naselle-Grays River Valley scores

In the other grades:

- Less than half of the students enrolled in the third and fourth grades met either the English or math standards.
- In fifth grade, 60 percent of the 25 students enrolled met the English standard though only 43.4 percent met the math standard.
- In sixth grade, more than half met both standards — 52.6 percent in English and 57.8 in math.
- In seventh grade, 44.4 percent (12 students of the 28 enrolled) met both the English and math standards.
- In eighth grade, more than half of those enrolled met both standards — 60 percent in English and 52.1 percent in math.

Fall salmon seasons set, with good forecasts

Columbia Basin Bulletin

LONG BEACH, Wash. — Greater than average forecasts of fall chinook and coho salmon are opening the way for more commercial fishing in the Columbia River.

The U.S. v Oregon Technical Advisory Committee preseason forecast for the 2015 fall chinook adult return to the Columbia River totals 925,300 fish which would be another strong run.

The forecast is 80 percent of the 2014 actual return (1,159,100) and 147 percent of the 2005-2014 average return (631,200).

Bonneville Dam passage is expected to total nearly 649,000 upriver fall chinook adults. Passage is typically 50 percent complete by Sept. 8.

The 2015 coho forecast to the Columbia River is for a strong return of 539,600 adults, which includes 377,300 early stock and 162,300 late stock. The forecast is 117 percent of the 2005-2014 average of 459,800 fish.

Bonneville Dam passage is expected to total 190,500 adult coho, which represents 65 percent of the total ocean abundance of Columbia River coho destined for areas upstream of Bonneville Dam.

Through Aug. 17, 20,744 adult fall chinook, 510,386 sockeye, and 125 coho had passed Bonneville Dam. The cumulative fall chinook count is the second largest since 1989 by that date.

Flows are low and temperatures are slightly above average at Bonneville Dam. Flow Tuesday on Aug. 11 was 138,600 cubic feet per second while the 10-year average is 169.7 kcfs. The average water temperature Aug. 11 is 70.6 degrees Fahrenheit and the actual temperature was 71 degrees.

In three meetings in recent weeks, the two-state Columbia River Compact set fishing periods for both treaty Indian and non-Indian commercial gillnetters, select area fisheries, research seine fisheries and recreational fisheries.

At its July 29 hearing, the Oregon-Washington Columbia River Boundary Compact set openings for the non-Indian early fall salmon commercial gillnet fishery, with three 9-hour

periods per week (Sunday, Tuesday and Thursday) through August in Zones 4 and 5. Remaining commercial fishing days are Aug. 20, 23, 25 and 27, beginning at 9 p.m. each day and ending the following morning at 6 a.m.

The late fall gillnet fishery is expected to begin Sept. 14, also in Zones 4 and 5. Coho gillnet fishing is expected in October, likely in Zones 1, 2 and 3.

The compact also set the select area gillnet fisheries (those commercial fisheries not in the main Columbia River channel) at its July 29 hearing. Gillnetters could fish the Deep River select area fishery in Washington for 36 nights starting Aug. 17, and for 46 nights, also starting Aug. 17, in Oregon’s Blind Slough and Youngs Bay.

The compact also set the recreational fall salmon fisheries. The Buoy 10 fishery began Aug. 1 and fishing will be allowed through Labor Day. Two fish are allowed, but only one can be a chinook. Retention of chinook closes Sept. 8-30 and will reopen Oct. 1 with a two-fish, two chinook bag limit.

At its most recent meeting, the compact set limits and timing on the 2015 beach and purse seine fish-

ing in the Columbia River.

Last year, the first pilot research seine fishery was on selected days Aug. 19 to Sept. 30, 2014. It was limited to 10 seine permits, four purse seines (fished from boats) and six beach seines. Some 45 commercial gillnetters signed up for the permits. Each permit was given an individual fish quota (IFQ) limited to hatchery chinook and coho salmon. A total of 6,000 chinook and 3,300 coho were allowed, although the actual catch was 2,400 chinook and 1,000 coho.

The chinook quota this year will be 5,000 fish and 1,700 coho are allowed, all hatchery fish. Again, 10 permits are allowed, but this year the number of permits requested as of Tuesday has been just eight, but just six permits have been purchased (four beach and two seine permits). Oregon and Washington are accepting applications to fill the last four permits.

Each beach seine will be allowed 400 hatchery chinook salmon and 150 coho salmon. Handling of 180 steelhead is allowed. Purse seiners are allowed 650 chinook, 200 coho and are allowed to handle up to 150 steelhead. Once a seiner reaches these limits, they must stop fishing.

El Niño looking to be strongest since 1997; more warm temps, less snow possible

Columbia Basin Bulletin

Driven by higher-than-normal Pacific Ocean water temperatures, an El Niño weather pattern has been building in strength since March, but its impacts will vary from one region to another.

“What’s new this month is that this could be one of the strongest El Niños” since 1997, said Mike Halpert, deputy director of National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration’s Climate Prediction Center in College Park, Md., during a monthly update on the El Niño southern oscillation weather pattern that was held Aug. 13.

Halpert emphasized that predicting how El Niño could affect storm systems along the West Coast and in regions such as the Columbia River Basin is difficult, largely because it is not the only influence on weather.

“If it was the only driver we could say a lot more than we can,” Halpert said. “El Niño is certainly different things to different people in different places.”

NOAA forecasters declared that a weak El Niño

had developed in March, prompting an advisory to be issued that remains in effect. A July update predicted the weather pattern had strengthened and will likely last into early next spring. Strong El Niño events are characterized by Equatorial water temperatures that are at 1.5 degrees Celsius above normal for three months.

Halpert said that temperature benchmark could reach or exceed 2 degrees above normal, something that has happened only three times in recent decades.

Generally, it is expected that this will lead to below-normal precipitation and higher-than-normal temperatures across the Columbia Basin and Canadian border states to the east through next spring. By contrast, El Niño could produce higher-than-average rain and snow in California and in Southwestern states, but it was noted that any increased precipitation due to El Niño is unlikely to make up for a four-year drought in California.

The broad-brush El Niño forecast for the Columbia Basin is not a good

one, considering there could be conditions that might match or exceed this year’s conditions — above normal temperatures that led to a “snow drought” across the region. While overall precipitation was close to average, there was a remarkably early snow-pack melt and runoff, with river flows and temperatures that are normally seen in August arriving in July.

“The real message is that it’s likely to be a strong event,” Halpert said of the El Niño pattern that will persist into next spring. And because it is expected to be a strong pattern, predicted impacts will “tend to be more reliable.”

However, Halpert said that even with a strong El Niño, predicting impacts from it still amounts to uncertain long-range weather forecasting.

“It’s important to remember that just because something is favored (by forecasting models), doesn’t mean it will necessarily happen,” Halpert said, referring to the varied effects that could result from one region to the next.

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