

ASSESSMENT:

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ered on track in English, and only 40.8 percent in math. At the 11th-grade level, the state average was 67.2 percent in English and 30.5 percent in math.

In western Umatilla County and Morrow County, Stanfield 11th-graders posted the best scores on both tests. The students exceeded the state average in English with 77.4 percent considered on track and narrowly missed the state average in math with 29 percent on track.

Stanfield Secondary School Principal Bryan Johnson said a variety of factors contributed to the students' success.

"We've just really focused over the last few years on trying to teach the Common Core State Standards and implement those," he said. "Our teachers just did a good job of breaking down those standards to make sure they're covering them within their classes. It's nothing super fancy. I think it's just strong teaching and assessing and a lot of preparation on the teachers' part."

Unlike the previous test, the Smarter Balanced assessment questions are not multiple choice. Students are required complete performance tasks, where they must read a passage, watch a video or look at an illustration and think critically to answer questions, Johnson said. All of the secondary school teachers implemented performance tasks within their curriculum last year, he said, so the students were better prepared for the test.

Johnson said the school utilizes a daily advisory period to provide additional support to all students. During this time, the students all completed practice tests, which helped them as well.

He also said the current seniors were a strong group of students.

"They're really motivated," he said of the current seniors. "I think that group really looked at it like a challenge, and they got after it. The credit really goes to the teachers and the students."

Echo 11th-graders also exceeded the state average in English last year, with 71.4 percent on track. Across all grade levels in English, Echo was just short of the state average with 53.2 percent on track. Only 14.3 percent of the district's 11th-graders last year were on track in math, but across all grade levels the district was closer to the state average with 34.6 percent on track.

Across all grade levels, Hermiston students were within 5 points of the state average in English and 3.4 in math — with at most single digit variances from the state average at every grade level through eighth. However, the percentage of last year's 11th-graders on track on either test were worse than any other grade in the district — and the students lagged behind the state average by double digits on both tests.

Only 41.9 percent of last year's Hermiston 11th-graders who took the test were on track in English, compared to 58.1 percent of district eighth-graders. Only 20.3 percent of 11th-graders were on track in math, compared to 35.8 percent in eighth grade.

Assistant Superintendent Bryn Browning said the high school numbers may be misleading because some students who had already met graduation requirements opted out of taking the Smarter Balanced test. While the state test is one way to meet graduation requirements, other options are available. She also said, of the students who did take the test, many who did not need it to graduate may not have taken the test seriously.

"We are concerned by the low score of the kids who did test," she said. "We're still actually analyzing the scores from the high school. It is a low number, and we know those kids can do better. Is it because they missed it? Is it because they already had graduation taken care of? We will see."

At Hermiston elementary schools, Browning said the results were similar to previous years with the old test.

She said the new test performed at each grade level, rather than only 5, 8 and 11, will help teachers in the lower grades because it provides more data. Teachers are already analyzing the results from last year about the students in their class this year, she said.

Umatilla School District Superintendent Heidi Sipe said, although the district's English score across all grade levels was poor, the results show significant improvement at each level from grade 4 to 11. While only 19 percent were on track at grade 4, 59.3 percent were on track by grade 11. The district has been teaching students to read in their native language, English or Spanish, for about 15 years, she said. While this



STAFF PHOTO BY SEAN HART

From left, Stanfield Secondary School seniors Luis Moreno, Jesus Carillo and Alexander Nuñez work on an assignment Monday in teacher Marilyn Durbin's class. Stanfield's current seniors outperformed local districts on the new Smarter Balanced assessment last year.

often hurts standardized test scores in elementary school, she said it pays off later.

"It's a long-term approach to literacy that we know, based on years and years of

data, gives us stronger results," she said. "I'm very pleased with our progression in English language arts, and it is very similar to what we expected to see."

The district's math scores, however, were a surprise, Sipe said. Only 14.9 percent of students across all grade levels were on track in math, and each grade level was more than 20 points behind the state average.

Sipe said local math tests showed tremendous student growth, so the district may need to reconsider how its curriculum aligns to Smarter Balanced expectations. She also said the style of the new test may have impacted the scores, and the district is "diving into the math data" to determine the best course of action.

Sipe said, although the new test was designed to hold students to higher standards, she assumed students who received grades of "C" or better would have been considered

on track. She said, after analyzing middle school data, however, she determined all of the district's students who were considered on track received high "A" grades in their math classes.

Although the new assessment considers only scores of three and four to be on track, Oregon Department of Education Deputy Superintendent of Public Instruction Salam Noor said in a statement that scores of two on the Smarter Balanced math test and the reading portion of the English test represent "an equivalent level of achievement as required on Oregon's former state tests." The state board of education voted to allow those lower scores to satisfy graduation requirements earlier this month.



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