

Lake Central Educators Lose Confidence in 2014-15 ISTEP+ Scores

All ten of our Lake Central School Corporation schools are extremely proud of the many ways in which we are committed to student learning. The manner in which we differentiate instruction for our students of all ability levels is one of the major sources of that pride. Families often comment how they have moved into our district for a variety of programmatic opportunities including special needs programs, extracurricular activities, and high ability classes offered within our buildings. Since the controversial ISTEP+ test from last spring might impact students, staff and our community, we feel compelled to explain our concerns related to this matter.

For the past several years, Indiana schools have been called upon to administer the ISTEP + assessment to students in grades 3-8 in order to use the results in a statewide grading system. This system is supposed to include measures of student growth based on a once per year test. Our schools have always been committed to utilizing a multitude of measures to determine the achievement of students and have never considered using any single measure to assess students. However, this is precisely the manner in which our state has designed their accountability system.

The controversies related to the spring 2015 ISTEP+ revolve around a few major problems with the test itself. First, the standards upon which the test was designed were not approved until May 2014, which gave teachers and students very little time to adjust to the new standards prior to the test. The questions were also being developed in haste prior to the test being given to our students. Normally, test questions are developed years in advance and piloted in order to ensure a valid test. These questions were developed in less than a year and not proven reliable. The length of the ISTEP+ was cut in half just a short time prior to the administration of the test despite objections of educators statewide. Two different versions of the test were given at random across the state. Experts have determined that the online version was in fact more difficult than the paper and pencil version and they have indicated that an upward adjustment is likely to occur for those who participated in the online assessment. How fair is it to compare students when they took two different tests?

Additionally, despite the test being deemed valid by some experts, the distribution of results has been delayed time and time again. Results that should have been delivered in June of 2015 are now estimated to be distributed in January, 2016. The most recent delay is due in part to a record number (292,000) of parent rescore requests. This figure is 3 times the normal number of rescore requests.

The other significant issue is the current plan to use the spring 2015 ISTEP+ scores to rate students and schools. Any attempt to measure student growth despite knowing that the 2015 test is very different than the 2014 version will yield questionable data. Multiple statisticians, former US Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, State Superintendent Glenda Ritz and Governor Pence have all called for using the 2015 results to establish a new baseline for student growth. State legislators have indicated they will create legislation to avoid using 2015 scores to determine student growth but appear reluctant to avoid giving individual school letter grades for last year. Placing a label on Indiana schools in the face of the abundant problems with the 2015 test does not in any way accurately reflect the learning taking place in our schools.

Lake Central School Corporation is committed to seeing every student achieve their individual potential. We are proud of the commitment of our teachers to challenge and help our children build skills each and every day. We embrace measuring student growth and for the last several years utilized multiple assessments instead of the ISTEP+ because of our concerns with this assessment. As a corporation, we have been sharing our concerns with both legislators and our locally appointed member of the State Board of Education.

If you share our concern regarding the 2015 ISTEP+ test and want your voice to be heard, please click here ([2015 ISTEP Petition](#)) to sign a petition that we plan to share with our statewide leaders in the near future.