

GATEWAY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Superintendent's Corner

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Results of the state's standardized tests have finally been released to the public. Once again, Gateway finds little change in our students' testing results. These results, which are reviewed throughout the district on multiple levels, have shown some expected results and have reinforced the strategies shared with the school committee and partially implemented in this year's budget. The process of improving student test scores requires a multi-faceted approach that includes teaching and learning, curricula and professional development, along with appropriate student supports in the classroom and throughout the district.

We all realize that improving test scores that only measure a small slice of what students need to be successful in life is only part of the overall educational picture. The idea of educating the 'whole child' has been part and parcel of education in the Gateway District and can be seen in our strategic improvement plan, in school committee goals, in administrative goals and in the activities undertaken by all staff to meet students' needs on a daily basis. While this of course includes English language arts, mathematics and science (the only areas tested by the state) it must also include the other, equally important curriculum areas as well as social-emotional learning, physical health, citizenship and twenty-first century skills such as collaboration, communication, creativity and problem solving. Skills and knowledge doesn't simply come from the old style of memorizing facts but rather from a blend of learning and applying knowledge to solve problems in a collaborative manner. This requires enhanced communications between participants and a great deal of creativity that may be expressed in a wide range of ways beyond just responding to questions on a piece of paper (and replacing paper tests with similar questions on an electronic screen, such as the state is doing, does not provide new ways to show mastery of knowledge and skills).

As individuals, we all recognize that what we know, what we can demonstrate as skills, and our abilities to complete numerous tasks are not the result of reading a book. Rather, our abilities come from a range of experiences including interacting with others, having the opportunity to see, be guided in practice, and hone skills in real life, of learning from our mistakes, in experimenting with different ways to solve problems, and in other ways that are too numerous to count. While not all of these experiences would be considered part of a traditional apprenticeship, what we're really doing each day of our life is fitting new knowledge in our existing skill set and creating new ways to use this to solve problems and live our lives as productive citizens. What we'll need to know, and be able to do, also seems to be changing rapidly. So while the basic age old knowledge in reading, writing and arithmetic is still the basis of learning, there is just so much more to becoming successful in today's world. The reality is that certain job skills are being rapidly replaced by new advances in technology (one only has to look at robotic manufacturing to see that the repetitive manual labor is now done by robots) and the demands on workers' knowledge and skills continues to change to reflect changing workplaces. The bottom line is that we must continue to enhance students' abilities to reformat existing knowledge, to be adaptive to changing conditions, and to consider emerging technologies so they can apply this to solving the new challenges in a world that is in constant flux. Throughout history, those who could positively adapt to changing environments were the ones who succeeded and flourished. As I wrote in an earlier column, this may require looking at our current educational model to see what needs to be done differently to ensure that students are ready to adapt to the changes we've seen and will continue to see.

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