

IOWA ASSESSMENTS

(Formerly known as Iowa Tests of Basic Skills or Iowa Tests of Educational Development)

Just as they do each year, the students in our Catholic schools in the Diocese of Des Moines take the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills (3-8) or the Iowa Tests of Educational Development (high school). These tests have changed for this year's testing in many ways. This month's Newsletter Notes will give you some information about the changes. More information will be available from your home school.

NAME CHANGE & A NEW LOOK

The first change is in the name of the assessments. The entire package of testing – no matter the grade level – is now known as the Iowa Assessments. When you hear your principal or teacher speaking about the “Iowa Assessments” know these summative assessments are the new name of the tests.

The tests look different too. Now the booklets are all in color and there are more graphs, charts, tables, and pictures that students will be required to use as they work through the questions in the test.

NEW QUESTIONS

Over the past year, Iowa Testing Program (creator of these assessments) has developed completely new tests. The new questions were created and then tested on Iowa students to ensure they would be accurate tools to use. (Our own Christ the King School participated in this pilot work.) Questions on this test are not only recall kinds of questions, but also questions requiring students to interpret what they have read and draw conclusions based on the information they have been given. These kinds of questions require students to think through the possible answers in a different way and are measuring higher level thinking skills of the students.

NEW NORMING OF SCORES

With brand new questions, the norming or scoring is going to be different than it was before. Across the nation, it appears that achievement has improved from the last norming period ten years ago -- more at the elementary level than the secondary level. So, your child may have somewhat lower national percentile ranks with the new test (for instance, if your child scored at the 93rd percentile last year his score might be at the 88th percentile this year). This does not necessarily mean that your child's performance has gone down - rather that it is compared to a different group of students than in past years. It DOES mean that it is *not* a good idea to compare previous percentile rank scores to new percentile rank scores.

Another change you will see is the move from percentile rankings to use of the National Standard Score. This scale places the student's performance on a broad scale of achievement across all grades. Within a grade we know the range of scores that are typical and can identify your child's score in comparison to that range. With the NSS we will have a more meaningful way to measure growth over time. Your teacher or principal will have materials they will share with you that will help you to understand this scoring difference a little better.

NEW REPORTS

One other change you will notice will be the look of the reports that you receive. The reports will contain more information about how your child is progressing on this assessment over time. You will see scores from the different testing areas, but also how your child did on the higher level thinking questions that were mentioned above. Your teachers and principals will provide you with information to help you read and understand the reports when they come home.

Please note – many of our schools take this assessment in the fall and we usually have scores back by Christmas. This year that will not be the case. Scores will not be returned to the schools that tested in the fall before February during this first year of change. Please be patient with the administrators and teachers as they have to learn how to read the new score sheets so they are able to accurately share the information with you. For schools that test later in the year, your scores may also be delayed.

Finally, what is most important to remember is that the Iowa Assessments are but **one** piece of evidence to show how your child is doing in school. The Iowa Assessments provide us with good information that helps us make decisions; however, each day your child completes work in school. When you take the time to look at your child's work at the end of each week or check their grades on the internet, you let your children know what an important endeavor their education is to you. In the Catholic schools in the Diocese of Des Moines we are lucky to have so many parents who make education a priority and we appreciate your interest in these assessments and all school work your child undertakes.