

## Keeping our composure amid the March madness



It's March, let the madness begin. In homes, workplaces and schools all over the state, people are frantically completing brackets and crossing their fingers for a favorable outcome.

A similar frenzy is taking place in schools across Kansas where staff and students are in the throes of state assessments. Each year, students in grades three through eight and one grade in high school take assessments in reading and math. This year, students in grades four, seven and once in high school are also taking science assessments.

The window to begin administering state assessments in reading and math opened Feb. 16 and was originally scheduled to close April 13. Given the unusual amount of severe weather parts of our state have experienced this year and the unusually high number of off days schools have faced due to inclement weather, we recently extended the testing window for reading and math assessments until May 2. This provides schools and students needed instructional time prior to the assessments. The testing window for science assessments remains from March 16 through May 6.

State assessments play an important role in Kansas' accountability plan for the federal No Child Left Behind legislation. Each year, an increasing percentage of students are required to meet a set achievement level on the reading and math assessments in order to meet Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) measures. While the accountability aspects tend to be what creates the "frenzy" associated with state assessments, it's important to remember that the assessments play a role in more than just accountability measures. State assessments are an important piece of understanding how individual students are progressing toward academic goals. When used in conjunction with other indicators, state assessments can help identify areas where students may need more or different instruction in order to grasp content, knowledge or skills.

Given the high stakes environment created by the No Child Left Behind legislation, it's understandable when the focus of schools occasionally and momentarily shifts to what is in the best interest of the school. However, as educators, we must ensure that our actions are always based on what is in the best interest of our students. Whether it's around state assessments, instructional decisions, infrastructure or funding considerations, when we ensure that we are always putting the needs and interests of students first, we can be confident that everything else will work itself out.

So, amid the madness that is March, remember to take a few moments to remind yourself why we do what we do and what is really important.



A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Diane". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Dr. Diane Debacker  
Kansas Commissioner of Education