

Westmoreland County Public Schools



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THE BENCHMARK TESTS

WHAT THEY ARE AND HOW WE WILL USE THEM

Submitted by A. Elaine Fogliani, Ph.D., Superintendent
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WHY DESIGN AND ADMINISTER BENCHMARK TESTS?

- The majority of school systems in Virginia have used benchmark tests as a best practice in achieving full accreditation.
 - Most school systems started with the test bank from The Tests for Higher Standards to develop the tests. Most school systems have now evolved to the development of system benchmark tests based on released test items and other banks of test questions. The plan for Westmoreland County Public Schools is to develop county-wide nine-weeks benchmark tests for each grade/subject.
- Benchmark tests give students the opportunity to practice with similar test items to the ones they will face on the Standards of Learning test. Best practices for success on high stake testing is associated with simulation test preparedness, i.e., SAT, GRE, Bar Exam, Medical Exam, etc.
- Benchmark tests give you a “dipstick” measurement of individual and group preparedness for the Standards of Learning Test.
- Benchmark tests assure students will have the opportunity to learn content by keeping the curriculum and instruction within a predetermined plan for implementation, i.e. curriculum pacing guides.
- Benchmark tests are diagnostic tools for teachers. Teachers can evaluate the instruction and curriculum and ask diagnostic questions about student learning. The questions posed need to center around both the learning needs of the students as individuals and as a group. The teacher can evaluate the teaching of content looking for strengths and areas for improvement.

“All, meaning ALL, students will achieve academic standards and demonstrate standards of the heart.”

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HOW WILL WE USE THE BENCHMARK TESTS RESULTS?

- Teachers and administrators may share the test results with students and parents. Parents may see their child's test but they cannot keep a copy of the test. Individual students may see his/her test but cannot keep a copy of the test.
- Teachers are encouraged to use the benchmark tests as an opportunity to reteach content and to teach test-taking skills. Going over the test in class and discussing why answers are correct or incorrect will strengthen learning.
- Benchmark results by teacher will be used to diagnose curriculum and instructional strengths and weaknesses. Principals and central office staff will be assisting teachers in creating strategies to address areas of improvement and to share best practices that result in student success on the benchmark tests.
- In order to assure that students put forth their best effort, it is important to tie the performance on the test to something that has meaning for students. At the elementary schools, if a student passes the benchmark test, he/she has an opportunity to win a prize. At the middle school and high school, we are counting the tests as part of the student's grades. **It is imperative, that in both these situations, we create a system that is fair to students.** The fairness test has the following criteria:
 - We notify students and parents in advance of how the results of the benchmark tests will be used;
 - We do not test content we did not teach;
 - We understand that this is only one indicator of student learning and use the results accordingly;
 - Teachers are able to defend to parents and students grades on the benchmark tests as they defend any other test, assignment, etc. used for grading purposes;
 - We look at issues surrounding the benchmark tests and adjust grades, practices, etc. according to how the issue meets the fairness test and is supported by educational research and best practice.

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