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In December, I posted a note on our District website regarding the recently released M-Step State Assessment Scores. I also mentioned that Van Buren Public Schools was looking at some anomaly patterns in the testing results at Savage Elementary School. The following will provide an update to that communication.

On December 2, 2015, I received a letter from the Michigan Department of Education Office formally requesting that Van Buren Public Schools conduct a self-investigation of Savage Elementary School's Spring 2015 M-Step administration due to anomalies found in the state's forensic analysis of school results. According to the state, the anomalies found "are highly unlikely due to chance alone."

Because of the seriousness of the issue, as well as possible ramifications, I immediately contacted our legal counsel, Collins and Blaha, P.C., and charged them to conduct a thorough and independent investigation.

Several data points submitted from the state and others were analyzed by the district. A sample of those data points included the following:

**Average Total Test Time for Student Cohorts:**

	Grade 3 Math	Grade 3 ELA	Grade 4 Math	Grade 4 ELA
Savage	75	193	101	157
State Average	59	115	64	111

**Average Item Time Spent by Student Cohort (in Minutes):**

	Grade 3 Math	Grade 3 ELA	Grade 4 Math	Grade 4 ELA
Savage	3.8	8.8	3.8	6.0
State Average	2.3	3.9	2.3	3.6

**Percent Proficient by Subject Area and Grade:**

	Grade 3 Math	Grade 3 ELA	Grade 4 Math	Grade 4 ELA
Savage	90%	79%	90%	77%
M-Step State Ave	48%	50%	41%	46%
2013-14 Savage (MEAP)	55.9%	70%	58.6%	80.2%
2013-14 MEAP State Average	40%	70%	45%	61%

**Percent of Students Scoring Advanced on M-Step:**

	Grade 3 Math	Grade 3 ELA	Grade 4 Math	Grade 4 ELA
Savage Spring 2015	58.02%	54.88%	54.17%	44.79%
M-Step State Average	17.7%	24.7%	15.3%	22.1%
Savage MEAP 2013-14	16.7%	16.0%	21.8%	Less than 10%

**Percent of Students at Grade Level at Savage Elementary 2014-15 NWEA Compared to M-Step:**

	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Math	3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Reading	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math	4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Reading
Fall	57%	52%	53%	43%
Winter	60.5%	55.8%	61%	59%
M Step	90%	79%	90%	77%

**Percent Proficient of Savage Non-GT Students:**

	Savage Non-G/T	State Average
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade ELA	62.4%	50%
3 <sup>rd</sup> Grade Math	85.7%	48%
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade ELA	54.5%	46%
4 <sup>th</sup> Grade Math	81.1%	41%

- Savage Elementary scored 6<sup>th</sup> in the state on Mathematics, out of over 2800 schools in Michigan
- Savage Elementary scored higher than a number of schools whose student enrollment is all gifted/talented

The state specifically suggested that the investigation include “interview testimony of the M-Step Coordinator at the district and building level, as well as teachers or proctors involved in administering M-STEP assessments in the grades and subjects in question. A sample of student observations in each classroom may also provide information.”

Following the state guidance, interviews were conducted with all staff who proctored the test, a number of students in both third and fourth grade as well as from each test group, the district coordinator, and several principals throughout the district. The former principal of Savage Elementary declined to be interviewed. Follow up interviews with some staff then took place.

The conclusion of the investigation was there were testing improprieties.

On January 8, 2016, I received a Determination Letter from the Department of Education Office of Standards and Assessment (OSA). The letter states that they “reviewed and accepts the summary of findings of the Van Buren Public School’s independent investigation into administration irregularities... The findings are consistent with OSA’s data forensic analysis.”

Further, the OSA issued the following actions:

1. Invalidation of all Savage student scores for the 2015 M-STEP
2. Van Buren Public Schools will notify by letter parents of every child affected
3. OSA M-STEP monitoring will take place at Savage for the 2016 testing year

The letter also stated that “the OSA greatly appreciates the exemplary cooperation of Mr. Van Tassel and the Van Buren Public Schools in resolving this issue. The thorough and well-constructed summary of findings from the investigation greatly assisted the OSA in being able to clearly understand what occurred without needing further investigation.”

The letter also summarized, “It is unfortunate that none of the educational staff in the building came forward in a timely manner which might have allowed time for students to retake the assessments. This aspect of this case will remain troubling.”

The Michigan Department of Education has communicated its final review, findings and requirements to Van Buren Public Schools. The School District’s next steps will include any potential discipline of staff and letters written to parents of all students affected by the decision to invalidate their spring 2015 MStep scores.

This has been an unfortunate incident which has serious ramifications for not only the students, but the district as well with regard to state required testing that is tied to millions of dollars in state and federal at risk funds. I have directed my staff to develop some specific action plans to address testing procedures to ensure this does not happen again.