



Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana

Pastoral Office for Education
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Dear Parents,

The Catholic schools in the Diocese of Lafayette-in-Indiana partner with families in providing a Christ-centered learning environment in which each young person can grow in faith and knowledge in order to serve God in this world and be eternally happy in the next. We are blessed with a multitude of people who make this happen. Pastors, parents, administrators, teachers, students and benefactors are just some of the groups who embrace the educational mission of the Church and enable young people every day to grow in knowledge and faith.

For many years educators have attempted to provide meaningful feedback to parents in the form of standards-based reporting, alternative and authentic assessments, narratives, and conferences by phone and in person. I truly believe that these methods are far more important than a single standardized test. I also believe that a single “grade” for any subject at any grade level is seriously limited in its ability to communicate student achievement. This is the reason that we use multiple assessment methods and a variety of means to communicate with parents and report student progress.

Valid standardized tests do have a place in assessing student achievement and curriculum effectiveness, but individual student performance is best interpreted within a bigger picture. I have serious questions and concerns about the validity of the 2015 ISTEP testing. Your child’s teacher is the best source of information regarding your child’s progress, so I encourage you to consult with him or her frequently, especially if you have concerns.

In Indiana school quality is based upon a single “grade” which is supposed to ensure accountability and indicate the quality of education to the community at large. Serious consequences result for those who have an undesirable “grade.” Public schools and their professional staff members have even greater consequences that impact their professional evaluation and livelihood.

The fact that school “grades” are largely determined by student performance on a single assessment alone is cause for concern. However, it is very clear that there are many questions about the validity of ISTEP assessment given last spring. The following are just a few factors that cause concern:

- the use of common core standards which had been gradually implemented were overturned;
- Indiana standards were developed within a short time frame and then released about six months before spring testing;
- new tests were developed within a short time period that resulted in faulty test questions, questionable formats and technical difficulties;

- and schools reported high stress on students –very severe in some cases, conditions for administration were in no way standardized, and many technical interruptions occurred during testing.

I have advised our school teachers and administrators to focus on their professional classroom assessments. I have great confidence in their abilities, professionalism and commitment to the young people entrusted to us.

It is my prayer and hope that our legislators, governor, state superintendent and department of education can work together, waive consequences of these tests for all schools, and then develop an effective and efficient system of accountability for education in our state. I ask you to encourage them through written or oral communications.

Parents, know that we recognize you as the primary educators of your children. We are privileged to partner with you in the mission of Catholic education. There is no greater gift than faith that we can share with the young people entrusted to us. May all of you be blessed in this holy season and continually experience the rebirth of Christ in your lives.

Gratefully,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Marie Williams".

A. Marie Williams, Ph.D.
Director of the Pastoral Office for Education