



# Grenada School District News

October 2009

## District Common Assessments: Did you choose D?

Last week Grenada School District students completed the new District Common Assessments (DCA) for grades 3 through 12. Sixth grade student Carly Upchurch said, "Some of the questions were pretty challenging, but there were also some easy ones. I did well on this first assessment." Fifth grade lead teacher and DCA developer Syreeta Amos had these comments, "District assessments are valuable tools for teachers, students, parents, and administrators to determine student strengths and areas in need of improvement. District assessments are giving teachers data for both their classes as a whole and individual students in the areas of language arts, math, and science.

Teachers are using the results of the tests to evaluate what students learned in the first nine weeks of school and what skills and objectives need to be reviewed." Dr. David Daigneault, Superintendent, adds, "increased demands are being placed on student performance as we strive for excellence in education."

### Grade 6 Language Arts Competency 1 objective c

The students will use grade level appropriate synonyms, antonyms, and homonyms.

The girls \_\_ (1) \_\_ \_\_ (2) \_\_ dirty gym socks on the floor which had an \_\_ (3) \_\_ on the custodian's attitude towards them.

Test Item: Read the sentence in the box.

Which group of words correctly completes the sentence in the box?

- A. (1) threw (2) their (3) effect
- B. (1) through (2) their (3) affect
- C. (1) through (2) there (3) effect
- D. (1) threw (2) their (3) affect

**"A good school is a place where the testing program validates more students, creates hope, documents hard work by good teachers, and clearly defines areas of improvement..." Dr. Carole L. White**

**Where did it all begin??** Dr. Bettye H. Neely, District Test Coordinator, explains, "Mississippi Code 37-16-4 and the *Mississippi Public School Accountability Standards 2008* requires all Mississippi students to be tested. To comply with these laws the Mississippi Department of Education (MDE) approved through the United States Department of Education (No Child Left Behind) a series of assessments based on the Mississippi Curriculum." These assessments are the MCT2 for students in grades 3-8 and the Subject Area tests (SATP) in grades 9-12. The scores from these tests are used to rate every school district in Mississippi. Grenada School District wants their students to have every advantage that accompanies a quality education. In laymen's terms, GSD's plan is to divide the curriculum into 9 week chunks (i.e. Pacing Guides,) to teach this information throughout the 9 weeks period, and then assess the students using the District Common Assessments at the end of each 9 weeks. These end of the 9 weeks tests mirror the MCT2/SATP. Dr. Carole White, Curriculum Coordinator for Grenada School District, states, "Rather than waiting until two or three weeks before the high stakes tests, we are preparing and practicing our students throughout the year. A good school is a place where the testing program validates more students, creates hope, documents hard work by good teachers, and clearly defines areas of improvement. This is what we are striving to create!"

## *Where did the DCA originate?*

During the summer, twenty-two GSD teachers met to construct assessments based on the Mississippi Curriculum. These teachers developed a comprehensive test for each 9 weeks based on the Grenada School District Pacing Guides. The tests were reviewed by an assessment specialist, GSD teachers attended test item construction training, and “tweaking” continued until the “valid and reliable” District Common Assessments were complete.

*Now that the students have completed the tests what happens next?* GSD teachers have new software called Progress Monitoring which grades and organizes the data from the DCAs. Progress Monitor is a web based application that



**Students use scan cards to produce immediate feedback on DCA.**

makes administering, grading, and calculating data for tests quick and easy. This happens in a matter of minutes. Immediately after Progress Monitoring grades the tests, teachers log in to their secure accounts and receive a plethora of information about their students’ progress. Teachers are provided with a wealth of data broken down by competency, strand, and objective for the school, their entire classes, and individual students. This data provides teachers with a powerful online tool to analyze data to make decisions in the classroom.

Each teacher will study the data and make decisions about how to proceed with instruction and lesson plans for the second 9 weeks. For example, this data will answer questions such as: Will I spend another 3 days teaching antonyms, synonyms and homonyms to the entire class, or will I provide remediation for the 3 students

who did not perform well on this objective since 73% of the students answered correctly? Will I reteach (changing teaching methods and activities) sound devices (e.g., rhyme, rhythm, alliteration, onomatopoeia, assonance) since 56% of the students answered D which is the correct answer, but the other 44% answered C, so should I just spend a little time clarifying between alliteration and onomatopoeia? Now teachers can identify strengths and weaknesses of individual students and entire classes, make decisions about how to approach their lessons for the coming weeks and year and how to help individual students, what to reteach, and what to emphasize. DCA will also be administered at the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> 9 week grading periods. These tests are comprehensive and will continue to give teachers more data to help drive instruction.

## *Is 50% correct a good score?*

The answer could be yes, but the correct answer should come from your teacher and principal because the tests vary. For example, 80% correct is the highest score in 6<sup>th</sup> grade Language Arts and 93% was the highest score in 7<sup>th</sup> grade Language Arts. Parents and students

are encouraged to talk with the teachers about this information. Teachers can easily print a graph comparing each student’s scores to the entire grade’s scores.

## *The end result?*

The DCAs are designed to help educators be more effective and efficient. These tools will help teachers guide GSD students to success!