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Results from now-retired IRI remain flat, but hopes are high for new test

(BOISE) – Results from the spring Idaho Reading Indicator – the last time that early reading test will ever be given -- are out, and they reinforce why educators are happy a new, online test will be rolled out statewide this fall, Superintendent of Public Instruction Sherri Ybarra said Friday.

“Idaho teachers are making a great effort to give our youngest students the reading skills and confidence that are crucial to building a foundation for successful lifelong learning,” Superintendent Ybarra said. “But the assessment they use to gauge students’ abilities at the beginning of the school year hasn’t been giving them the information they need to maximize students’ skills.”

Overall results for the 87,541 students who took the K-3 exam this past spring show small declines in proficiency – about half a percentage point overall -- compared to Spring 2017, although the amount of improvement between students’ fall and spring results remained about the same as in previous years. About 72.4 percent of tested K-3 students met proficiency benchmarks, compared to 73 percent in spring 2017. That spring, 85,901 students took the IRI.

“Results are basically flat. They have been flat for a number of years,” said Karlynn Laraway, SDE director of Assessment and Accountability. “It really speaks to the change in assessment, and the need for that change.”

The new test K-3 students will take when they start this school year will give a much more complete picture of which aspects of reading children are strong in, and where they most need help, Laraway said.

A key issue with the original IRI is that it only assesses children’s fluency in reading, not other key areas including phoneme awareness, alphabet knowledge, vocabulary and comprehension, she said. Istation’s Indicators of Progress Early Reading Test, also referred to as the new IRI, assesses all of those reading areas.

“The old test is not measuring how well students read,” Laraway said. “It’s measuring how quickly they read, not whether they understand what they’re reading.”

A strong foundation in comprehension and other reading fundamentals is essential for students when they move into higher grades and other subjects, she said.

Teachers in about 50 schools across the state gave the new test a strong endorsement after piloting the test in their classrooms last year, and educators throughout Idaho have been training on the new test, provided by Istation, this summer. More Istation training is set for late September and early October in Lewiston, Coeur d'Alene, Idaho Falls, Pocatello, Twin Falls and Boise. That training will focus on using the rich data from the fall assessment to inform instruction

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Attachment: IRI data summary for 2015-16 through 2017-18.