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## MEMORANDUM

TO: Parents and Caregivers  
FROM: Rebecca Holcombe, Secretary of Education  
SUBJECT: Smarter Balanced Assessment: Another Measure of Learning  
DATE: March 17, 2015

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Today, schools across Vermont will begin administering the Smarter Balanced Assessment, which is the new state test and which replaces the NECAPs.

As your child takes these tests, I ask you to do her or him a few favors:

First of all, keep these tests in perspective: they are just another tool to measure learning that your teachers can use to plan improvements to their teaching **through a better understanding of your child's progress to date**. Our children will take tests for all kinds of purposes in life: to get a driver's license, to be eligible to hunt, to enter a profession. Tests will likely be a part of their lives. We don't do them any favors when we get our children stressed about tests.

Second, help us all keep focused on the purpose of education. We want our students to be engaged in school and excited to try out their learning in new contexts. We hope our students understand that good work takes a lot of effort. I visit a lot of schools and speak to **many** students, and when I ask them what the best measure is of how much they have learned, they describe senior capstone projects, objects they created on 3D printers, a computer program they wrote, a nature trail they planned and built for a community, mock trials, long-flying hot air balloons they built using scientific concepts, films they made to help students with disabilities think about post-secondary opportunities. One student pointed at a pile of drafts, and spoke about how much work it took to create a great piece of writing.

And most of all, let's not forget that our schools are communities that help raise our children to be good, thoughtful and considerate citizens. We count on our schools to help our children discover what they want to do with their lives, and what role they want to play in their communities. The relationships our children build with their teachers may shape the course of their lives, as this loving tribute on the radio from one Vermonter to his shop teacher makes clear.

<http://digital.vpr.net/post/doyle-shop-class>

I know that in many states, and particularly those that chose to evaluate their teachers based on student test scores, schools and parents are protesting tests because of the way sanctions on teachers **and schools** are eroding their programs. **Here in Vermont, we don't like labels, but since all schools that receive federal funds have to wear them now, we see them for what they are and we are encouraging our schools to move on and focus on more meaningful goals**. Let's support our schools as they work on what really matters: teaching well and broadly so that all our children are able to build a strong civic, cultural and economic future for our state.