



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

TESTING IS OPEN FOR DEBATE

In April, 2018, Professional Educators of Tennessee raised the issue on Testing, with a hard-hitting editorial called the *Trouble with Testing*. Now the Superintendents of two low performing districts, Shelby County and Metro-Nashville Public Schools are eliciting media attention by challenging testing across the state. Welcome to the club.

Testing has taken a wrong turn in public education. I have always tried to keep it simple: testing is like your school picture; it is what you look like on that particular day. Kids go in to take a test. Teachers show up to make sure kids are taking their own test. Parents encourage their children to do their best. However, like *Ozzie & Harriet*, *Leave it to Beaver*, and the *Lone Ranger*, those days are gone.

With an infusion of \$501 million federal dollars of *Race to the Top* money we hurried to increase standards by adopting Common Core, which was soon corrected by moving back to state standards. We then increased testing, changing both format and frequency. Tennessee also adopted new evaluation methods. The teachers' union supported the incorporation of TVAAS data into the state's teacher evaluations, which landed Tennessee \$501 million from the federal Race to the Top grant in 2010. Professional Educators of Tennessee did NOT support the use of that data on teacher evaluations, nor did they sign a support letter on the original grant submission.

Not everything Tennessee tried was damaging, but it is not debatable that, thus far, the Age of Accountability has failed students, teachers, parents and taxpayers. Since 2012, Tennessee has had one misstep after another in testing. In 2013, our tests were not aligned to our standards. In 2014, the issue was transparency, notably quick scores and test score waivers for final semester grades were the major issue. In 2015, the new TNReady online tests had issues in the post equating formula. In 2016, we fired the vendor, Measurement, Inc. because after the online platform was botched, they were unable to get out a paper version of the test. In 2017, we were again plagued by issues due to scoring discrepancies. This year 2018, had issues related to testing, including the belief by the testing vendor, Questar, that the Questar data center was under attack from an external source, although it is never thought that any student data was compromised.

At no point since 2012 were any of the testing issues the fault of students or educators. However, for educators, they are often the ones who bear the brunt, quite unfairly, of parental anger. Students also suffer, with everything from loss of instruction time to not understanding their educational progress. When we make education decisions on the basis of unreliable or invalid test results, we place students at risk and harm educators professionally. This is especially unfair to the hardworking teachers in our state. To policymakers and stakeholders alike we must ask these questions:

1. Why are we relying so heavily on test scores to make important educational decisions about students, teachers or schools, especially when the process is flawed? For example, when officials thought the Questar data center was under attack from an external source, there should have been no greater priority by the Tennessee Bureau of Investigation to identify and prosecute those individuals guilty of this activity and confirm that no student data was compromised. Fortunately, there was no attack.

SUMMARY

Clearly there is a problem with testing in Tennessee. It isn't our students or our educators. It is a flawed testing system.

2. Should we question the reliability, validity, and accuracy of testing in Tennessee since 2013? Especially when shifting between online to paper tests? Note: Reliability relates to the accuracy of their data. Reliability problems in education often arise when researchers overstate the importance of data drawn from too small or too restricted a sample. Validity refers to the essential truthfulness of a piece of data. By asserting validity, do the data actually measure or reflect what is claimed?

In Tennessee we appreciate straight talk and candor. We unquestionably detest hypocrisy. We understand mistakes are made by individuals, by companies and even by our government. We are not pointing fingers, just stating a fact. Clearly there is a problem with testing in Tennessee. It isn't our students or our educators. It is a flawed testing system.

Shawn Joseph and Dorsey Hopkins timed the announcement of their joint press release well. A sitting group of mostly outgoing legislators were at the Capitol at the time to discuss education. It is also political season. Their joint letter will momentarily take the attention away from their own issues. However, we welcome the discussion. Unfortunately, simply offering the much-ballyhooed solution of another "blue ribbon" panel to discuss the testing issue is a mere diversion. For teachers, thank *Race to the Top* which was supported by the previous Superintendents of Shelby County and Metro-Nashville Public Schools and the teachers' union. I wish both men had offered a solution. We will help you out- Eliminate TVAAS data from teacher evaluations. That would be an enormous leap forward.

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