

February 17, 2015

Dear Colleagues:

Thanks for all you do to further the achievement of Wisconsin's children. The work of you and your staff is truly heroic given the difficult environment. As I travel the state, I too have heard concerns about the proposed changes in assessment, how those changes might impact data in the educator effectiveness and school report card systems, and whether the state should continue with testing this year.

I want you to know my principles and position regarding our state assessments.

The Badger Exam (Wisconsin's Smarter Balanced Assessment) is a rigorous and valid assessment that was successfully piloted across Wisconsin last year. Everyone agrees this assessment is a vast improvement over the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE). The Badger Exam will measure our collective efforts to implement our more rigorous standards and will provide valuable feedback to our state's educators and parents.

I support the annual testing requirements that presently are found in state and federal law, including the use of the same tests by all publically funded schools in our state. Annual statewide assessments are necessary to provide information about student growth and achievement to parents, educators, policy-makers, and to the community. While the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), also known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB), has its faults, disaggregating student achievement data by race, poverty, disability, and English language proficiency is critical for improving learning for all students.

Wisconsin is a high achieving state overall, but we face some of the largest achievements gaps in the country. This issue is real and affects Wisconsin's communities in different ways. An annual assessment of all students is more vital than ever to meet these challenges. Without it, we have very limited measures to inform and assist our parents, students, and educators. This principle of annual assessment remains true regardless of the test vendor or how often the test vendor changes.

Assessments should be seen as a flashlight that helps educators and parents shine a light on students' strengths and weaknesses and supports student learning. It is the increasing use of test results as a hammer to punish schools and educators that drives much of the fatigue and frustration. Do I think that any standardized test can totally and accurately reflect all the good work that is going on in your schools? Absolutely not. Standardized tests are one important checkpoint in time, nothing more, and nothing less. But it is one checkpoint that helps us to identify achievement gaps and successful work that is being done to close those gaps.

There is a great deal of national dialogue about testing, including the number of tests, the value of formative versus summative tests, and the role of tests in high-stakes accountability and instructional improvement. I share these concerns, signed onto a national effort to examine this, and will be working with stakeholders, including many of you, to address this in Wisconsin.

Let's get to what we know right now and a road map going forward:


1. **We will administer the Badger Exam as scheduled.** Every student is required to participate in an annual statewide assessment under state and federal law, which cannot be waived in either state or federal law. Wisconsin State Statute §118.30 and ESEA section 1111(b)(3) (20 U.S.C.-§6311(b)(3)) govern testing requirements. These are long-standing laws that are very clear with regard to the testing requirements. Failure to administer the required assessments at the state or local level will jeopardize up to \$500 million in federal education funding.
2. **If state law mandates a new Mathematics and English language arts/reading test for 2016 in grades three through eight, we will move forward to ensure that the replacement is high quality, aligned to our standards and on-line, like the Badger Exam.** The preparation and hard work you, your staff, and your students have done for this year's Badger Exam will not be wasted if the test changes for next school year.
3. **I am working at the state and federal levels to delay for one year integrating the new assessment data into educator effectiveness evaluations, and school and district report cards.** I support hitting the pause button on aspects of school report cards, and educator evaluations, related specifically to the new Badger Exam. I am working with legislators on a bill that would provide this delay for the 2014-15 school year. Also, the DPI is exploring flexibility under the federal ESEA waiver renewal process to delay integrating new assessment data for one year in the educator effectiveness system and the state's school and district report cards.
4. **As always, due to public reporting requirements, results will be included in WISEdash after you have had the chance to check them.** We will be able to smooth the transition so the longitudinal data is still relevant from last year to this year and with whatever happens in the future. Transparency of results will continue to be a high priority, even if there is a pause in the use of this assessment on the report cards.

We will be discussing what test will be used in 2015-16 and beyond with policy-makers. If vendors change, the test will be aligned with our standards. I understand the massive amount of work that has been done over the past four years on our new standards and I continue to support your hard work in using them.

I offer the DPI's support to you through our assessment period this spring. Contact Mike Thompson, PhD, Deputy State Superintendent, at michael.thompson@dpi.wi.gov or 608-266-3584.

Thank you for your continued service to Wisconsin's children.

Sincerely,



Tony Evers, PhD
State Superintendent

TE:jjp

**Joint Meeting of the Senate Education Reform Committee &
Assembly Education Committee
March 10, 2015**

**Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction
Testimony in Support of Senate Bill 67 & Assembly Bill 78**

Senator Farrow and Representative Thiesfeldt, thank you for holding public hearing on this important issue. My name is Jeff Pertl, and I am a Senior Policy Advisor at the Department of Public Instruction (DPI). I am testifying in support of Senate Bill 76 & Assembly Bill 78. DPI also supports the clarifying amendment (and this testimony will reflect that intent).

There have been a lot of changes going on in our schools over the last few years, including new district and school report cards, an educator effectiveness system, interventions for low performing public schools, college- and career-ready standards, interoperable data systems, academic and career planning, and next generation assessments.

In State Superintendent Evers' travels across the state, he has heard concerns about the changes in assessment and how those changes might impact data in the educator effectiveness and school report card systems. In his February 17, 2015 letter to District Administrators, State Superintendent Tony Evers outlined key principles around uniform, annual assessment:

- He supports the annual testing requirements that presently are found in state and federal law, including a uniform assessment for all publically funded schools in our state.
- Wisconsin is a high achieving state overall, but we face some of the largest achievements gaps in the country (and we know that because of assessment).
- Assessments should be seen as flashlights that help educators and parents shine a light on students' strengths and weaknesses and support student learning.

However, he also wrote that he supports "hitting the pause button on aspects of school report cards, and educator evaluations, related specifically to the new Badger Exam." This bill does that in two specific ways.

SB 67/AB 78 creates a "report card holiday," where district and school report cards would not be published in 2014-15. This will provide much needed relief to schools, allowing them to focus on student learning and successful implementation of the new assessments, without worrying about how results of the new assessments will impact report card scores.

To be clear, schools are still required to take state assessment under federal and state law, and student performance will be included in the WISEdash public reporting portal. Please note, these requirements cannot be waived and failure to properly assess students and report results puts at-risk \$600 million in federal education funding.

The assessments, though new, will still provide valuable information about student learning. Moreover, publicly reported data will keep the focused on student performance and ensures we all remain vigilant around closing achievement gaps, while reducing report card-related anxiety in this time of transition.

SB 67/AB 78 as amended will delay integrating the state assessment into the educator effectiveness (EE) system for one year. The holistic EE system will still be implemented, but will not include results from the Badger Exam. Effectiveness is about much more than the state assessment and educator scores would be based on the other metrics, including student learning objectives (SLOs) and measures of practice. Removing the state assessment data from the EE system this year will relieve educators of the stress of wondering how these new assessment results will affect their evaluations, allowing them to remain focused on improving student learning.

SB 67/AB 78 offers a sensible pathway forward that provides needed flexibility and relief, while preserving Wisconsin's longstanding tradition of high quality education. I have included the State Superintendent's letter to district administrators for your reference, and I would be happy to answer any questions.



of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

101 East Wilson Street, Room 219, Madison, Wisconsin 53703
Voice: 608/266-7826 Fax: 608/267-3906

March 10, 2015

To: Senator Paul Farrow, Chair Senate Committee on Education Reform and Government Operations
Representative Thiesfeldt, Chair Assembly Committee on Education
Members, Senate Committee on Education Reform and Government Operations
Members, Assembly Committee on Education

From: Survival Coalition of Wisconsin Disability Organizations

Re: SB 67/AB 78 - Pupil assessments, evaluation of educator effectiveness, and school accountability reports

No position: For Information Only

Thank you to Members of the Senate Committee on Education for continuing to thoughtfully address next steps in Wisconsin's school accountability system.

Survival Coalition is a statewide coalition of more than 30 disability groups - several of which directly support students with disabilities and their families to advocate for quality special education supports. Parents of children with disabilities depend upon accurate information provided through a robust assessment process as a piece of the puzzle showing how their school is doing to support their child and all students with disabilities.

New Assessment

For students with disabilities, the roll out of the current Smarter Balanced Assessment has reportedly been less than ideal. We have concerns about the inability of the test to fully implement computer adaptive testing that can show a more accurate picture of the knowledge of a student with a disability. Because students with disabilities often have scattered skills (i.e. strengths in one area- such as comprehension, but simultaneously lower skills in another area) a test that does not allow for leveling does not show the true picture of a student's learning capacity and gaps. While the Smarter Balanced test was intended to roll out with leveling features intact, allowing students to move up and down throughout the assessment as their knowledge allowed, the current version of the test does not have this capacity and will not be functional this year.

In January the National Federation for the Blind (NFB) and other disability advocates wrote to the Smarter Balanced Governor Board about their continued concerns about accessibility and appropriate accommodations for students so close to the exam's roll out. NFB indicated their prediction that the test, in its current form, could deny the right of students with disabilities to participate equally in the assessments. There are 21 states that were slated to use the Smarter Balanced common core assessment tests in K-12 starting this spring. Given the accommodation and accessibility concerns, it is good that this particular assessment is put on pause in Wisconsin.

Pause on Report Card

Our organizations are generally not supportive of deferring accountability for schools or for principals or teachers for any amount of time. The achievement gap for students with disabilities is too wide and the stakes are too high.

However, given that other accountability proposals on the table have not yet incorporated adequate accountability for students with disabilities, we hope that our concerns can still be addressed and that a high quality accountability system will soon be put into place. We are assured that federal law still requires DPI to administer a state test, that assessment data will be publicly available through WISEdash, and that Educator Effectiveness will continue as required under the federal ESEA waiver.

We support the idea of restarting the report card next year with one fully functioning and high quality assessment for all students, across all schools receiving public funding.

Principles for Accountability

As we shared in testimony related to SB 1 and have acknowledged in our analysis of the Governor's current budget proposal in AB 21, we are concerned that other school accountability provisions may move forward without taking into account basic principles of quality that are essential to parents of children with disabilities. We reiterate our principles for a solid, comprehensive accountability system that adequately addresses the needs of students with disabilities below:

- An accountability system that is built upon an “apples to apples” comparison of children with disabilities. Students should be taking the same assessments, with the same accommodations availability to allow parents to adequately compare scores across different types of schools.
- Students with disabilities should be identified with a common definition across all schools.
- Robust multiple measures of accountability must include growth, gap closure and achievement disaggregated specifically to identify the performance of the subgroup of students with disabilities.
- The system should incorporate all schools that receive public funds.
- The system must include and specifically reference all students, including those with significant cognitive disabilities taking the alternate reading and mathematics examinations administered under s. 118.30.
- Accountability measures should address measures of college and workforce readiness and information related to high school graduates entering the workforce.
- Accountability measures should include information on the number of pupils who are suspended or expelled.
- Transparent reporting of school performance should include a required posting on a school's website to allow parents easy access to information on the performance of students with disabilities.

Thank you in advance for addressing the concerns outlined in this testimony. Our Coalition members are ready to provide support and feedback as you continue this process.

This document prepared by the Survival Coalition Education Issue Team.

Survival Co-Chairs:

Maureen Ryan, moryan@charter.net; (608) 444-3842;
Beth Swedeen, beth.swedeen@wisconsin.gov; (608) 266-1166;
Kristin M. Kerschensteiner, kitk@drwi.org; (608) 267-0214

The people of the state of Wisconsin, represented in senate and assembly, do enact as follows:

SECTION 1. 115.385 (1) (intro.) of the statutes is amended to read:

115.385 (1) (intro.) ~~Annually~~ Subject to sub. (1m), annually by September, the department shall publish a school and school district accountability report that includes all of the following components:

SECTION 2. 115.385 (1m) of the statutes is created to read:

115.385 (1m) The department may not publish an accountability report for the 2014-15 school year.

SECTION 3. 115.415 (2)(a)1 of the statutes is created to read:

115.415 (2)(a)1. Notwithstanding section 115.415(2), results from the 2014-15 state assessment may not be used in the educator effectiveness system.

SECTION 4. Nonstatutory provisions.

(1) Notwithstanding section 115.385 (1m) of the statutes, as created by this act, the department of public instruction may include measures of pupil performance on statewide assessment examinations administered under section 118.30 of the statutes in the 2014-15 school year in the longitudinal data system maintained under section 115.297 of the statutes.