

Oiler Spills  
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For the past 5 years, Indiana schools have experienced changes to academic standards as well as to yearly standardized testing administered to students. In 2014, the state changed the academic standards to be more focused on college and career readiness. During that time, the yearly ISTEP assessment involved 9 hours of testing for students in grades 3-8 which proved stressful to both students and teachers. More frustration mounted with the 2015 spring ISTEP testing, when schools across the state experienced computer glitches during testing as well as scoring errors. The results of that year's testing showed a 20% drop in scores which was blamed on the implementation of the new college and career standards. The state switched to a new test vendor in 2016 to deliver ISTEP testing to schools which did help with some of the computer glitches but still scores continued to show Indiana students as underperforming.

Last spring, Indiana students participated in the new mandated ILEARN assessment. ILEARN differs from ISTEP because it is an adaptive test that adjusts either up or down in difficulty based on a student's previous answers. It is not a timed test and it was given to students during one testing window. Scores were released to schools and parents earlier this month. The results showed a significant drop of 13% from last year. In most grade levels and subject areas, the state averages for student performance range from 45%-50%. Only 37% of Indiana students who participated in the spring 2019 ILEARN assessment passed both Math and English. Taking into consideration the lower scores on this new assessment, many Indiana elementary and middle schools would be facing a "D" or "F" grade this year. Based on the lower test scores, the State Superintendent Jennifer McCormick and Governor Holcomb are asking state legislators to approve "hold harmless" on accountability grades for schools this year. If the legislation is passed, there will be a one year pause on school grades and no school would be labeled with a grade lower than they received last year. This puts into question the validity of this testing and whether it is an accurate reflection of student and school performance.

Educators are not afraid of accountability and we understand it is part of our profession. As educators, we just want a school accountability system that is fair and accurately reports how our students are achieving. The intent for any testing should be to assess how well students are doing and identify learning gaps so teachers can plan instruction to meet their students' needs. This can be done from assessments that teachers use

throughout the school year that do not waste precious class time or come with a price tag of \$45 million dollars which is what the state is currently spending for three years of ILEARN testing. As the Superintendent of the School City of Whiting, I believe that the increased focus on high stakes testing by the state has changed the intent of these tests to punitive grading for schools that negatively impacts our students and teachers. School accountability grades are factored into our teachers' evaluations and can negatively impact their pay in a time when Indiana is also struggling with a shortage of teachers and administrators. It is not fair to measure any student, teacher, or school by one test. We are so much more than that and one score does not sum up all that our schools and teachers provide to students every day or accurately reflect a student's skills and knowledge. Teachers spend all day interacting with their students and learning about their academic, social, and emotional needs. Our teachers have the knowledge and experience they need to make their students successful without these tests.

I believe that students in Indiana would be better served if the amount of classroom time wasted on testing was spent engaging in more instruction. Students and teachers would also benefit if the millions of dollars spent by the state on testing would be diverted to increasing teacher salaries and securing additional staffing such as counselors and social workers to better address students' social and emotional health. If we have to resort to teaching to these tests which change frequently based on what the state deems as most important in our academic standards, we will end up with a very narrow curriculum that focuses on good test taking and not on creating well rounded students with life skills prepared to be successful in the future. As parents, you can help us in the battle for fair testing and accountability for schools by reaching out to our legislators and expressing how you feel about testing and funding for schools. You can access the names and emails of our local legislators on the Indiana General Assembly website at <http://iga.in.gov/>. We need to hold our legislators accountable for making decisions that are in the best interests of our students, teachers, and schools. Our future depends on it!