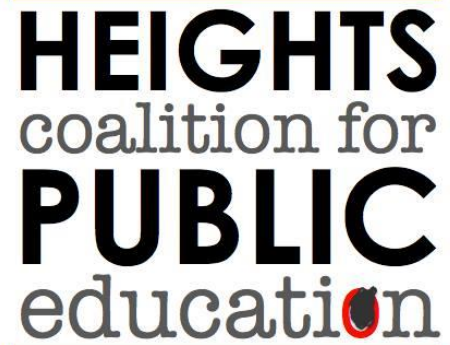


Paolo DeMaria  
Superintendent of Public Instruction  
25 South Front Street  
Columbus, OH 43215

September 26, 2016

Dear Superintendent DeMaria:



As Ohio develops its rules for implementing the new federal education law, Every Student Succeeds Act, we have an opportunity to make badly needed corrections in education policy.

The Heights Coalition for Public Education, a group of more than 900 parents, community members and educators in the Cleveland Heights-University Heights school district is concerned about the current education policy emphasis on high stakes testing and privatization. As we see them play out in our public schools they are more like a war on public education than meaningful, humane and authentic remedies to the gaps in opportunity and success that need solutions.

First we question the emphasis on labeling and accountability over investment and support. Schools are complex environments and systems. Like human beings and individual learners, the quality of the education available in a school or classroom does not lend itself to simple measurement and judgment. Not everything is measurable. The reliance on test scores to evaluate that complexity is inadequate and misleading.

Second, tests are flawed measures of teaching and learning and should not be used to make consequential judgments about children, teachers, schools, districts or communities. Test-based accountability ignores the reality that children learn at different speeds and in different ways, and that many out of school factors influence performance on standardized tests. Furthermore, building an accountability system for teachers and school districts using a system that expects uniformity is not appropriate or fair. It ignores so many variables. As a result the system is punitive rather than informative, motivating or effective.

The test and label approach is especially harmful to the neediest children who are most likely to fail to meet the random cut score of the test; the highly competent and dedicated teachers who choose to serve the neediest children; and communities that are economically and racially diverse. Ending high stakes decisions based on unreliable tests would reduce the damage.

How Ohio chooses to implement ESSA could rectify some of these problems.

- Stop using test scores to evaluate teachers.
- Use tests to inform learning. Stop using them as the dominant measure of school quality.
- End the use of a single letter grade to report education quality. Quality is too complex to be reported in this way.

- Institute an opportunity index as an additional measure of quality that acknowledges efforts by local districts to expand opportunities for students living in poverty, children in their county's social service system, children who qualify for services under IDEA, and English Language Learners.
- Acknowledge the complex goals of our education system and the diverse elements of human development, and create an education environment that encourages collaboration and exploration more than compliance and fear.
- Acknowledge the diverse sources of inequality that we want educators to help children overcome and address the harmful differences in educational resources available to school districts that foster inequality.

Our school district is economically and racially diverse with a large population of poor children. Our students deserve great teachers and adequate resources to provide them individualized support. Ohio's opportunity gap in public resources and punitive grading system work against attracting and retaining teachers and providing all students what they need. The constant loss of funds to charter schools and Ed Choice Vouchers only makes this worse. Districts need more support and less blame and punishment.

We urge you to consider the well being of future generations and of our system of public schools. Implement ESSA in a way that creates trust within our school communities and public confidence in our schools.

Please find enclosed the position of the Heights Coalition for Public Education and a list of local citizens who support this position.

Sincerely,



Susie Kaeser, Co-Convenor  
1554 Compton Road  
Cleveland Heights, OH 44118



Ari Klein, Co-Convenor  
3393 Dellwood  
Cleveland Heights, OH 44118

Cc: State Board of Education Member Roz Painter-Goffi, District 5  
State Board of Education Member Mary Rose Oakar, District 11  
The Hon. Janine Boyd, State Representative District 9  
The Hon. Kent Smith, State Representative District 8  
The Hon. Sandra Williams, State Senator District 21  
The Hon. Kenny Yuko, State Senator District 25