March 16, 2015

Written Testimony in regards to HB 74 from Maureen Surbella

There has been significant testimony and correspondence regarding the Common Core and PAARC assessments over the last two years. Testimony has been presented both in support and opposition of both the learning standards. As you are aware, these are two separate issues and should be considered separately. Ashtabula Area City Schools has implemented the Common Core standards and Ohio's New Learning Standards in both Social Studies and Science. Every professional development, DLT's, BLT's, and teacher TBT's are all focused on making the best instructional decisions for students. But, there have been many obstacles that have interfered with improving instruction.

In my personal opinion, the Common Core Standards are written in such a manner that can be confusing to educators, teachers, districts, and parents. Although the intention is to "define the knowledge and skills students should gain throughout their K-12 education in order to graduate high school prepared to succeed in entry level careers, introductory academic college courses, and workforce training programs", there are concerns regarding content mastery, clarity of content for instruction, and assessment and timeframe for the assessment of content.

I am honored to have the opportunity to represent Ashtabula Area Teachers Association to share these concerns with you. I appreciate the fact that as our elected officials, are looking out what is best for our students. The topics of Common Core standards and PAARC are two entities, both with good intentions- both with significant concerns.

Common Core along with New Learning Standards in Relation to HB 74

1. **Clarity**-The Common Core standards need more clarity. Teachers need to know specifically what needs to be taught, the extent that it needs to be taught for a particular grade level, and resources for districts along with examples of what the content would look like when assessed.
2. **Mastery**- If each grade is expected to master the content of the grade in which they are in, this simply is highly inappropriate both for the amount of time that we have to teach in a school year along with the fact that the many portions of the content are too difficult to master in a particular grade levels.
3. **Resources-** Many districts are working hard to have the necessary resources to teach the content. However, teachers are having to research, analyze, and interpret these standards and hope that they have correctly discovered what the content means. Then, educators are hoping to have a complete understanding and speculate to the extent that students would be assessed.

PAARC in relation to HB 74

PAARC is just finishing the Performance Based (mid-year) Assessment Cycle. As many of you may know, sometimes things just look better on paper than they do when implemented. As a teacher of over twenty years, a teacher with a Master's Degree, works for a college outside of my daily 6th grade teaching position, and as a teacher that has taught a spectrum of grades and abilities-never in my life have I been so concerned about the state of education and the direction that we are going. I am passionate about my career and even more passionate about all students receiving a high quality public education.

1. **PAARC IMPLEMENTATION**- Last year, I was fortunate to administer the pilot PAARC last year. Even though it was paper-pencil version I was able to go through the experience prior to this year. I had many suggestions for improvement last year, suggestions for improved implementation, and suggestions for clarity. Those suggestions were not asked of the educators that piloted the test. They were also not asked of the schools or administrators that had volunteered classrooms. They did ask a few questions to students which were ambiguous which would provide only positive survey results for Pearson and those that they shared the results with.

Suggestion: Gather feedback from schools, district, and educators on implementation and ways to improve the assessment piece.

2. **AMOUNT OF TIME TO ADMINISTER PAARC**- Although HB 74 is attempting to reduce the test time to no more than 3 hours per year for students. This is a good start; however, it simply is not enough. The amount of testing for students over their K-12 education is insurmountable. "In 2001, before No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed, there were six federally-mandated tests per student" Are you aware that we are now testing students a total of 17 times". This is not including the numerous formative, summative, school, district or other type assessments. Due to school improvement plans, we administer monthly pre-assessments, post-assessment to show growth in each aligned common core area. We report those scores and meet to discuss ways to improve instruction and target areas of need. These have become valuable to staff members as we can focus and check in on students and their understanding. Questions were derived using common core assessment items and sample questioning.

3. **TIMEFRAME FOR IMPLEMENTATION**- This year the PAARC PBA window was administered for approximately 4 weeks. This window will conclude just prior to the Spring Break/Easter Vacation that most districts follow. We will begin the EOY end of the year window one week after returning. This is approximately one month after the mid-year was given. How is this showing growth from an assessment one month prior and less than that amount of time due to testing interferences to be prepared with that material?

   Suggestions:
   1. If two assessments must be given, a pre-assessment within the first quarter of the school year which will test knowledge of that grade level, then a post assessment within the last quarter of the school year which shows growth of that content knowledge is a suggestion that many educators have discussed and which follows the Ohio Improvement Process.

   2. If one assessment is given, an assessment that is given at the latest timeframe would be beneficial. Yearly, teachers often discuss the rationale of giving an assessment in early April in which two months of school remains. Also, this would maximize instruction throughout the entire year with limited interruptions.

4. **TECHNOLOGY-**
   A) **Availability** - Although technology is evident in every district, the extent of this technology and availability of technology is inequitable across districts and even across schools within districts. The need for computers for testing will have taken approximately three months of technology usage for any student due to testing and the lack of resources. Due to the window and also the amount of testing that is needed, we had to seal computer labs which prohibited access for STEM classrooms and other technology based research or learning. This does not support the intentions of HB 74 and the need to have access technology.

   Example: In order to complete all classrooms in the testing window allotted, my students had to walk across our elementary campus to take the assessments in another building. Since it was February, students walked across on one day with wind chills approaching -10 below zero. Due to the timeframe and availability of technology, our building scheduled all parts of any test to be administered in one day. This allowed my students to walk back to our home building for lunch and then return to the test building to administer the final portion of the test.

   B) **Technology Impacting Assessment and Results-** Some of the questions do not show what the students know. For example- there are questions that test more their ability to figure out technology rather than whether they understand the content. Furthermore, many students do not have the technology skills in order to complete the test.

   Features that impacted students taking the test and potential results (as mentioned from 4th grade students):
   1) Scrolling back and forth to find the answers
   2) Highlighting not saved when they read the passage
   3) Some drag and drop difficult.

4) Easy to lose place and time finding place
5) Scrolling back to find details confusing when going from story to question
6) Essay- typing is difficult when typing with one or two fingers
7) Time limit is a problem. My friend can type faster and I know more, but couldn't get done.
8) Too much writing- too many essays.
9) Writing confusing- had many parts to the question to answer.
10) Reading level- most of the test is above my reading level.
11) Some questions tested more on my ability to use technology than do the Math.
12) Some features were not enabled for AIR (as per test coordinator) such as text to speech, etc.

5. **Content**- The framework in which the content is tested is significantly more difficult than the actual content learned. The multi-complex and confusing wording of the test prohibit to truly capture what the student actually knows about the topic and to the extent the child can perform to their ability.

    1) **Personal Example**- My daughter is Senior, National Honor Society, in the top 10% of her class, has 21 hours Post-Secondary Coursework from Kent State and will be attending the Honors College at University of Toledo in the fall. She took the practice PAARC for 9th grade and received an 11/28. She explained that the complexity of the test questions, the wording of the questions, along with what they are asked to do with the knowledge does not prepare them for College Readiness and beyond. She felt it tricked students and she could not show what she could know because if she got the first part of a question wrong, it caused the whole answer to be wrong. I have an 18 year old, a 9 year old, and an 18 month old. Outside of my career, my children are some of the many reasons I am here today.

6. **Health Concerns of PAARC**: Some students are exhibiting health related issues and which has been documented to physicians and to schools.

    Example: Student took PAARC and prior to the end of the assessment realized she would not finish. The student ended up at the ER and then later brought to hospital in Cleveland. The parent explained they thought at first appendicitis, and then Crone's, finally discovered it was Irritable Bowel Syndrome exacerbated by stress and anxiety. She spent over a week in the hospital. The doctor was concerned that the student continued to be concerned about the test and how she didn't answer some parts as well as she could and that she would study more next time. This is a high achieving student that performs well and has performed well on standardized tests in the past.

    Example: Special Education Student that is given extended time to take the test. Rules require a student to complete a section in the same day. Student began test at 8:00 a.m. and did not complete until 3:30 p.m. with lunch only as the pause in the testing. Parents sat outside and waited for over an hour for student to finish. Student worked diligently to answer each question thoroughly and completely.

7. Safe Harbor, passage of HB7, and Roster Verification- Why are districts instructed to complete Verification if students, districts, and teachers will not be penalized by the results of 2015 PAARC Assessments? This makes many wary of the fact that it truly isn't "Safe Harbor" for all.

In conclusion, the passage of this bill will help gain a clearer focus on the educational issues facing this state. No longer can we be followers in an effort to solve problems so close to home. We must lead with confidence and recognize that sometimes there is a different way of doing things. I hope that you found this testimony to be insightful and beneficial as you continue to look out what is best for students in the State of Ohio.

Sincerely,

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