



**Seeking
Equity and
Excellence for
Kids in neighborhood public schools**

April 20, 2015

Members of the House Education Committee,

Please accept this letter as formal testimony on all bills addressing testing and reductions to the “federal minimums” from the grassroots groups of parents, educators and students from Boulder, Cherry Creek, Colorado Springs, Denver, Douglas County, Durango, Littleton, Fort Collins, Jefferson County, Merrino, Poudre, Pueblo, and St. Vrain as well as Colorado Education Association (CEA), Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE) and Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB). Together we represent thousands of parents, educators and students from across Colorado. All of our organizations are committed to improving outcomes for all children in public schools in Colorado, preschool through post-secondary college and career.

Our organizations support efforts to reduce testing to the federal minimums. Reductions in testing can co-exist with the values of comparability, transparency, and growth. Currently, the majority of states maintain testing at the federal minimums, and maintain accountability systems that allow for comparability, transparency, and growth, debunking the myth that every student must be tested in every subject every year.

Colorado has used state assessments since 1997 to compare student achievement levels across districts in the state for accountability purposes. Likewise, for decades, Colorado has used the NAEP (National Association for Educational Progress) for comparisons across the country, and to monitor the progress of sub-groups of students broken down by race, gender, socio-economic status, and English Language acquisition. NAEP has provided comparable measures of achievement levels and achievement gaps over the past four decades (NAEP started in 1969). According to NAEP results, achievement gaps closed during a period of time in the 1980’s, when there was less testing, not more. Since that time, there has been an increase in state testing while the achievement gap has stabilized.

Ask us how we SEEK to define equity, accountability,
standards, local control, data and choice.

Currently, PARCC is only being administered in 8 states, not every state like NAEP. Several member states including Massachusetts and New York are only administering PARCC to a sample of students or not at all. PARCC alone, therefore, will not provide true interstate comparability. Within Colorado, parents, educators and students use more than the score on one test when comparing classrooms, schools and districts.

A single test every year does not and should not make or break a student's success in college, career, or civic life. In fact, since the adoption of a "single statewide test" in grades 3-10 college remediation rates have more than doubled from 28% to 60%. In addition, the ACT has been required of 11th graders in excess of the federal requirements. Any conversation about reducing testing must consider the purpose and use of the ACT for both students and educators.

We believe that the purpose of a state assessment system is to provide objective feedback to school and district leaders, as well as policymakers to evaluate the system, not individual students. Parents and teachers use a body of evidence to inform conversations about individual student growth and progress, including local and classroom assessments. Local assessments provide comparability of student learning of district curriculum, which includes state standards, analysis of instructional effectiveness in professional learning communities, district and school program evaluation for actionable adjustments. Local assessments provide accountability by ensuring timely growth toward achievement of district curriculum for every student as schools ensure reduction of achievement gaps.

Providing local education providers the option to reduce testing to the federal minimums is not only supported by our coalition of parents, educators and students, but was a recommendation of the West Ed study commissioned by the Colorado Department of Education last year, the Colorado State Board of Education last fall, and supported by broad research in education policy.

As you continue your debates in this committee and the committee of the whole we appreciate the voice you will give to the people directly impacted by your policy decisions: parents, educators and most importantly, students. Thank you.

* Lisa Escarcega, Past President ~~of~~ CASE
1202 Task Force
