

November 25, 2015

The twenty five members of the **Northwest Indiana Public School Study Council** (NWIPSSC) would like to share this message to the *community* regarding 2015 ISTEP+ results.

As schools across the state are reviewing the preliminary release of the 2014-2015 school year ISTEP+ results, we are finding that the percentage of students passing the exam has dropped as a result of Indiana's flawed system of standardized testing. Statewide, English/Language Arts passing percentages have declined by an average of 16% and math passing percentages are down by an average of 24%. Some schools are seeing a more significant decrease than the state average. Let us not forget that these measures in no way measure the success or failure of our students, teachers, or schools. Instead the scores represent the effects of (1) an absurdly long 12-hour test that had to be reduced at the last minute, (2) a test that covered topics that were changed by the state after the beginning of the school year, giving our teachers an impossibly short time frame to change the entire curriculum, (3) a test that used technology enhanced items making the format different from any test our students have experienced, and (4) a test that, despite the previously listed issues, placed expectations on students to understand and master much more difficult material than at any time in the past.

Ironically, these historically low results come in the same month as the historically high results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as "the nation's report card." The federal NAEP testing program first reported Indiana scores in 1992, and the 2015 results for Indiana are the best ever. Parents can expect careful analysis of students' ISTEP+ results when they are made available, but schools will also be sharing results of other measures of student progress that each district uses to tell a much more accurate assessment of our students and our schools.

Until the ISTEP+ results were shared with the State Board of Education last month, Governor Mike Pence had claimed there would be no need to defer the use of the new test results to determine teacher evaluation ratings or school letter grades. HOWEVER, IN A LETTER TO THE STATE BOARD ON OCTOBER 27, GOVERNOR PENCE WROTE, "I am writing to inform you that I have reached out to Republican House and Senate leadership in the Indiana General Assembly and legislation is currently being crafted to ensure that test results will not negatively impact teacher evaluations or performance bonuses this year. It is important to ensure that our A-F system fairly reflects the efforts of our students and teachers during this transition year."

State Superintendent, Glenda Ritz, has been suggesting that the State Board of Education hold schools and teachers "harmless," releasing them from negative consequences as a result of the issues with ISTEP+. For 2015, Superintendent Ritz argued that school letter grades should only change from the 2014 grade in the unlikely event that a school's 2015 letter grade increased. State Superintendent Ritz proposed that teacher evaluations and pay be treated in a similar matter. Evaluations could improve or stay the same as 2014 but not decrease due to lower ISTEP+ scores. Teacher performance compensation also could not be decreased due to lower ISTEP+ results under her proposal, only increased or held the same. The state board rejected these ideas.

If something is not done legislatively to fix Indiana's accountability system, the vast majority of schools across the state of Indiana will be slapped with a grade of C, D, or F. As a result of this broken system, schools that have been very successful for many years will be deprived of instructional time with students because they will be required to complete massive amounts of paperwork to document a plan to address their "low grade." We believe this to be profoundly unfair, and we urge our state legislators to enact legislation that shields schools and teachers from the effects of this ineffective system. We encourage community members who agree with our assessment and care

about public schools to let your state legislators know how you feel. While the problems with ISTEP+ are well-documented, we believe that our amazing students and teachers are still the same amazing students and teachers regardless of these results. Our teachers and staff members remain committed to providing the children of Northwest Indiana with outstanding educational experiences. Despite how our students are tested by the state and despite how the state applies labels and grades to our schools, we will always rise to the occasion and put our students first.

Dr. Tom Cripliver, Superintendent
Chairperson of the NWIPSSC
Lake Station Schools

Dr. Peggy Buffington, Superintendent
School City of Hobart

Mr. John Hunter, Superintendent
Vice Chairperson
Union Township Schools

Mr. Aaron Case, Superintendent
Treasurer
Kankakee Valley School Corporation

Dr. Teresa Eineman, Superintendent
Crown Point Community School Corporation

Dr. David Pruis, Superintendent
Duneland Community School Corp

Dr. Rod Gardin, Superintendent
East Porter County Schools

Dr. Cheryl Pruitt, Superintendent
Gary Community School Corporation

Dr. Peter Morikis, Superintendent
Griffith Public Schools

Mr. Thomas Taylor, Superintendent
Hannover Community School Corp

Dr. Larry Veracco, Superintendent
Lake Central School Corporation

Dr. Sharon Johnson-Shirley, Supt
Lake Ridge New Tech School Corp

Dr. Tony Lux, Superintendent
Merrillville Community School Corporation

Dr. Nathan Kleefisch, Superintendent
MSD of Boone Township

Mr. Destin Haas, Superintendent
North Newton School Corporation

Dr. Richard Weigel, Superintendent
Portage Township School Corporation

Dr. Stacey Schmidt, Superintendent
Porter Township School Corporation

Dr. Steve Disney, Superintendent
River Forest Community School Corp

Dr. Youssef Yomtoob, Superintendent
School City of East Chicago

Dr. Walter J. Watkins, Superintendent
School City of Hammond

Mr. Brian Smith, Superintendent
School Town of Highland

Dr. Sandra Martinez, Superintendent
School City of Whiting

Dr. Jeffery Hendrix, Superintendent
School Town of Munster

Dr. Debra Howe, Superintendent
Tri-Creek School Corporation

Dr. E. Ric Frataccia, Superintendent
Valparaiso Community Schools

Edward Schoenfelt, Northwest Indiana Public School Study Council,
Executive Secretary, cell number 1- 219-309-6120

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