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July 13, 2015

Commissioner Pam Stewart
Florida Department of Education, Office of the Commissioner
Turlington Building, Suite 1514
325 West Gaines Street, Tallahassee, FL 32399

Dear Commissioner Stewart,

This letter is in response to a request from legislators to identify a solution to reduce the number of hours students are engaged in state mandated testing and to find a valid and reliable way to nationally assess our students. In Seminole County, we understand and value accountability and the importance of a valid and reliable tool that measures individual student achievement and student growth. In supporting the Governor's initiative to produce college and career ready graduates, assessment tools need to be aligned to the Florida Standards and the skills sought by businesses.

It is often easy to be critical of work that has been done; it is much harder to come forward with a solution. The simple solution we are proposing is to work with the Governor, the Legislature and you to support the use of nationally normed-referenced tests statewide beginning in 2015-16 in place of using the Florida Standards Assessment (FSA).

Florida law charges you with the design and implementation of an assessment program that results in data that districts can use to improve instruction. Respectfully, the 2014-15 administration of FSA failed to achieve this goal and, even if the data is subsequently determined to be valid, obtaining the data was far too disruptive to valuable instructional time. The solution being proposed is to replace the 2015-16 ELA and Math FSA with a paper-based nationally normed test, such as the Iowa Assessment for elementary and middle school students and the PSAT/SAT for 9th-10th grade students (currently Iowa and SAT are approved concordant tests). These tests would provide nationally normed data within approximately 30 days utilizing a valid and reliable instrument and reduce the per student testing time to approximately four hours per student per year compared to over a month of schoolwide disruptions due to FSA testing. Our proposed solution would minimize the inequities stated below experienced by our students and vocalized by our community.

- Students with disabilities are being denied the same instructional time as their non-disabled peers. Per the DOE 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 testing schedules, there is a 14-day difference between the testing windows for paper-based tests and computer-based tests resulting in decreased instructional time for students utilizing paper based testing accommodations.
- The mandate to utilize computers for state testing and the elongated testing windows to accommodate multi-session tests results in students moving in and out of testing labs, disrupting instruction for 29 days at our middle schools and 31 days at our high schools.
- The April 20th state technical issue impacted thousands of our high school students. The testing platforms have been plagued with network and procedural issues, software bugs, and instability throughout the testing window.

By supporting our request to permit the use of nationally norm-referenced standardized achievement tests beginning in the 2015-16 school year in place of FSA, you will confirm your commitment to doing what our parents, students, educators, business leaders, elected officials, and community members have asked us to do--find a solution to reduce, not abandon, a rigorous and nationally recognized assessment program for our students. Our teachers deserve to teach and our students deserve to learn. We are available for further discussion and look forward to receiving your response.

Respectfully,

Walt Griffin, Ed.D.
Superintendent
Seminole County Public Schools