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JOHN E. DEASY, Ph.D.
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

January 11, 2013

Tom Torlakson
State Superintendent of Public Instruction
California Department of Education
1430 N Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

Dear Mr. Torlakson,

We are excited about the new generation of student assessments, announced January 8 by the California Department of Education. We believe that the new assessments, coupled with the implementation of rigorous Common Core standards, will provide more meaningful and useful data to guide the instruction of our students.

We are disappointed that neither Los Angeles or any large urban school district across the state was included in the work group that developed the report. It's inexcusable that the concerns of such a vital constituency were not addressed in the planning of this critical initiative.

Though we support reducing the number of tests administered to allow districts and school to transition from STAR to the new generation of assessments, the recommendation to suspend all portions of the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) assessments that are not required to meet ESEA or used in the Early Assessment Program has implications for school districts in working with our most at-risk populations. Below are our concerns regarding the recommendations outlined in the report to the Governor and State Legislature.

1. The recommendation to only test in grades 3-8 and 11 means that 9th grade students would not be assessed in English language arts or math. Our district closely monitors the progress of students in 9th grade as this is a critical grade that often determines future completion and success in high school.
2. Additionally, 9th grade students taking Algebra I would not be assessed. Districts would not have the assessment tools to measure the progress of students in this course, which is often the gatekeeper for higher math courses and college admission.
3. LAUSD is currently implementing a revised Master Plan for English Learners that is part of our agreement with the Office for Civil Rights (OCR). The plan, approved by OCR, outlines the reclassification criteria for English Learners. One of our criteria is ELA CST results. The lack of state mandated testing in second grade means that third grade students who would have met criteria for reclassification based on 2nd grade CST scores would have to wait until benchmark assessments in third grade in order to meet reclassification criteria. The lack of English language arts assessment data in grades 9 and 10 will also necessitate that school districts invest in an alternative valid and reliable assessment to determine whether English learners have met reclassification criteria. Though Deputy Superintendent Deb Sigman discounted my concerns by stating publicly that districts could use classroom grades, the California High School Exit Exam and other academic measures to reclassify their English-learners, the CAHSEE test is not administered in ninth grade.

As you are aware, one of the criteria required by Education Code 52164.6 for reclassification is: *"An empirically established range of performance in basic skills, based on nonminority English-proficient pupils of the same grade and age, which demonstrates that the pupil is sufficiently proficient in English to succeed in an English-only classroom."*

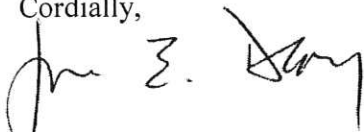
The ELA CST has served to fulfill his requirement in Grades 2, 9 and 10. Districts will now need to invest in adopting a new measure that is empirically valid and reliable.

4. The Academic Performance Index (API) for high schools in the 2013-14 school year and beyond will be not be fully representative of all students enrolled. The academic portions of the API will be heavily weighted by 11th graders and students taking the CAHSEE, which covers grade 6 and 7 standards in Mathematics.
5. Finally, we are concerned about the technology infrastructure needed for full implementation of the assessments in the 2014-15 school year. Our district has accelerated efforts to equip all of our schools with the technology infrastructure necessary to administer online assessments. We are also working diligently to provide all students with the devices necessary to access and complete assessments online but we are not near the capacity needed to have over 500,000 students tested in 2014-15. Although we understand that the testing windows will have increased flexibility in 2014-15, we are concerned that access to technology will create an inequity among socio-economically advantaged schools and districts and non-socio-economically advantaged schools and districts. For example, more well equipped schools and districts can take advantage of testing the majority of their students nearer to the end of the testing window while less well equipped schools will have to spread out testing during the entire testing window. In addition, the Smarter Balanced assessments will not be administered online for efficiency purposes but rather to assess students' 21st century skills. Therefore, schools and districts need to have resources so that all students have access on a daily basis to the appropriate technology to enhance their learning.

We would like to suggest that the CDE consider continuing with assessments in grades 2, 9 and 10 at the option of districts who choose to continue to assess in those grade levels. These optional assessments would not have to be included in state accountability systems but would provide districts with useful information to monitor the progress of students. Individual districts would not have to bear the costs of developing and validating assessments in those grade levels. We would also suggest the CDE explore alternatives to online assessment in 2014-15 so that districts will have options if the required technology infrastructure is not in place.

We look forward to engaging in a conversation with CDE regarding these issues.

Cordially,



Dr. John E. Deasy
Superintendent

c: Members, Board of Education
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