

## *A Plea to all Educators: The Time is Now!*

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I have been listening to teachers, educational support professionals, principals, and parents, as well as other civic organizations connected to public education throughout the State of Ohio during the past two years. I can, at best, only describe the mood and outlook of in Ohio as fearful, uncertain, and angry. Politicians and enemies of public education have turned public schools from institutions that open the hearts and minds of all pupils to the opportunity of creating a vibrant democracy, a higher standard of living, and a better tomorrow into a underfunded entities that resemble prisons more than welcoming places of nurture and learning.

How did we allow this to happen? The TEST! The injection of high stakes standardized testing into Ohio's education system has allowed politicians and the enemies of public education to create a false and misleading picture of public schooling in the state of Ohio, a false proxy that portray public schools and the educators who staff them as failures. We did not win the fight against high stakes testing the first time around. We failed to be vigilant to the realities and research available about accountability and high-stakes testing. And, *that* made all the difference.

Today, we must be vigilant in the defense of public education and oppose, with one informed collective voice, the use of high stakes testing to demonize teachers and to paint false pictures of public schools. Education needs to be about teaching and learning not about standardized testing. As dedicated professionals, we cannot allow special interest groups and the politicians they own to continue to craft a system of accountability where teachers and schools are judged and condemned for the things that they do not control. Rather, we must advocate to be judged for those things and only those things we clearly have professional control over. No longer can we allow ourselves to be judged on standardized test score that are shaped overwhelmingly by the forces and factors of children's lives outside of our classrooms and schools.

The vital message for all educators must be that high stakes standardized testing in the state of Ohio is wrong and is as indefensible morally as it is mathematically. Politicians and special interest groups have created a message that high stakes standardized tests are the only way to measure teacher performance and quality. The facts, supported by extensive research, show clearly that high stakes standardized testing and the metrics they feed into are used to demonize teachers, punish public schools, and mislead local communities. All educators need

to publicly expose to the actual intent and consequences of high stakes testing so that the false assumptions used to demonize teachers and public schools can be banished forever.

We, as teachers, educators, and public school advocates, must rise up and actively challenge the enduring falsehoods such as student test performance is caused by teacher performance, that there is no such thing as low performing students only low performing teachers, and the biggest fiction of all, that good test scores are indicative of good teaching. The message we must convey to the entire State of Ohio is that standardized testing and good teaching are two completely different things. OTES, for-profit charter schools, vouchers, the defunding of Ohio's public schools are all directly rooted in Ohio's high stakes standardized testing.

The Ohio Education Association has begun to take action with the recent new business items that deal with forming coalitions with other unions and civic organizations, with creating a public information campaign exposing for-profit charter schools, and with proposing a 3-year moratorium on all decisions connected to standardized testing. We, the professionals of education, need to RISE UP, ADVOCATE, and take our message of TRUTH to the public, to our elected officials, and to the institutions who benefit from a healthy system of public schooling. The time is now for us to begin take back public education for our students, our communities, and our hard-working citizens. *Failure is not an option!*