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PRESS RELEASE

November 23, 2015

Elkhart County Superintendents' Message Regarding 2015 ISTEP+ Results

As schools across the state are reviewing the preliminary release of the 2014-2015 ISTEP+ results, we are finding that the percentage of students passing the exam has dropped as a result of Indiana's botched 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 results 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 teachers an impossibly short time frame to adjust the 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 ISTEP+ results come in the same month as historically high results on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as "the nation's report card", were released. The federal NAEP testing program first reported Indiana scores in 1992, and the 2015 results for Indiana are the best ever. Parents can expect a 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 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 suggested 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. 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. Unfortunately, The State Board of Education 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 robbed of instructional time with students because schools 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 Elkhart County community members who share our concerns to let state legislators know your thoughts on this issue.

While the problems with ISTEP+ are well-documented, we believe our amazing students and teachers are the same amazing students and teachers regardless of these results. Our teachers and staff members remain committed to providing the children of Elkhart County 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 all Elkhart County students first.

Elkhart County Public School Superintendents

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