

Talking Points: OEA Commission on Student Success

May 11, 2016

Background:

There has been widespread recognition across the political spectrum over the last year that the top-down mandates of the No Child Left Behind era have not achieved their desired results. The overuse of standardized tests in measuring student achievement has caused undue stress for too many students, anxiety among parents and a demoralized crop of educators who have seen the joy of learning sucked out of too many classrooms.

The passage late last year of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) was a tacit acknowledgement that a new path must be charted. States and local communities will now have the opportunity to rethink what works best for public school students and to develop appropriate plans.

In that context, the report of the OEA Commission on Student Success and its vision for a high-quality public education for all students is particularly timely. It represents an important contribution to the public dialogue as policy makers, legislators and all of the stakeholders in Ohio's public schools prepare to address what ESSA has made possible – a new and better means for achieving student success.

Talking points:

- Testing will continue to be part of the mix in measuring student growth, but with less emphasis. “High-stakes” tests should be significantly curtailed.
- We need to re-introduce the human element, and allow for the well-trained, professional judgement of educators and principals to play a greater role in evaluating student and teacher performance.
- Students should be given an opportunity to show their proficiency in various subjects through a means other than a written test.
- A sound accountability system should strike a better balance between punishment and reward. Teachers are prepared to be held accountable, but they should have the opportunity to grow and not be measured by narrow prescriptions.
- The Peer Assistance and Review (PAR) program that provides mentoring and the evaluation of teacher performance by teachers is one of the best ways to develop great teachers.
- The current accountability system labels schools and school districts based upon test results. This distracts from the goals of providing a broad curriculum and meeting the

needs of all students. Educators, parents and the public need a balanced view of a school in order to focus on how best to improve and provide opportunities for students.

- The report provides not only a “vision” of what a high quality public education system would look like, but tangible examples of what works. That includes a successful Community Learning Center in Baltimore, MD and how Finland has eliminated the use of any external standardized tests and has become the world leader in student achievement.