



July 3, 2013

Superintendent Barresi,

Your comments as reported in the Tulsa World this week stirred a great many thoughts as I reflected on them while attending the Model Schools Conference in Washington D.C. I would like to begin this letter by clarifying the erroneous information you have received, and conclude with some suggestions and offers of assistance.

First, I would like to correct the misinformation you have received from a source yet unknown to me regarding the origin of the errors experienced during the administration of this year's tests. Contrary to your comments, the malfunctions experienced during testing were not due to "district issues." The reality, both for Broken Arrow Public Schools and many other large districts across the state, is our technology infrastructure is more than prepared to successfully complete the required online testing. The source of the malfunction rested with the testing company, which was not prepared to host the high volume of test-takers from around the state, and whose own helpdesk confirmed this with our district's Technology Department staff members. A nearly identical issue manifested during the state of Indiana's online testing. Our technology experts – nearly all of whom have worked in the private business sector – constantly monitored our bandwidth and server utilization and can verify that our internal systems ran smoothly, well below any threshold for concern. We have third party vendors who also monitor our throughput and bandwidth consumption, and they have verified our internal findings for those testing dates. If you are being told the issues were a result of the districts' lack of "technology readiness," you are being misinformed. Broken Arrow Public School district maintains a wired and wireless network at more than 30 sites; we have 1 GB of bandwidth between all sites that goes back to our central data center which has a 10 GB circuit. We also have a 600 MB pipe to the internet, and we are the only school in the state to have a Mini-Hub Fiber Node, courtesy of our collaboration with Cox Business. In short, the technology requirements for state-mandated, online testing are easily managed by our technology infrastructure.

Second, I agree with your recommendation to the Governor that our state should withdraw from PARCC. There are a number of proven assessment tools already in use that could be utilized for the purpose of measuring college readiness: PLAN, EXPLORE and ACT to name a few. If this is not an acceptable solution, then I implore you to involve currently practicing educators in creating viable assessments. There are teachers and administrators throughout this state who are experts in their field. This decision to withdraw from PARCC presents the perfect opportunity for the leadership at the State Department of Education to seek input and advice from the educators who are experts on the subject. Let Oklahoma educators assist you in determining what our students need to be college and career ready, and allow us the opportunity to develop high-quality, meaningful assessments. We have the technology and expertise needed to develop and implement a method of assessment that will enable our state to lead the nation, but we need the funding and the support of our state leaders to make this a possibility a reality.

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Third, as a superintendent of a public school, I am charged with being a good steward of taxpayer dollars. This requires constant reflection and refinement of the practices and procedures used within my district, as well as a willingness to listen to and collaborate with the patrons I serve. Recognizing that you are in a similar leadership position, and acknowledging that I am one of your patrons, I have a few questions to which I hope you will take the time to evaluate and respond.

1. Given the multiple issues with the chosen testing vendor, why has their contract been renewed? Has their performance evaluation given any evidence of acceptable performance? Have the malfunctions experienced this year been corrected, and have we any proven assurances that we will not experience the same issues next year? If, as you state, public schools do not have the technological capacity to successfully deploy these tests, it would seem a renewal with this company only sets the stage for a repeat of the same disastrous scenario.
2. Prior to sharing statements that the testing failures were at the hands of the school districts, did you pause to check with school districts to verify this information? Did you gather information from schools of various sizes throughout the state in an attempt to pinpoint the source of the malfunctions or look for patterns that would assist you in troubleshooting the issues?
3. What will be done with the flawed test data that has been collected? Will students and teachers be evaluated based on these results in spite of the malfunctions and frustrations that were experienced during the testing window?
4. You have indicated that teachers will be involved in your search for solutions to these issues, but what is your plan for gathering stakeholder input? Specifically, who will be involved, how will those participants be selected, and will they truly be a representative sampling of all school districts in Oklahoma?
5. When do we go back to doing what's best for kids? Like many other educators in Oklahoma, I grow increasingly more weary and frustrated by state leaders who refuse to listen and continue to initiate poorly planned reforms. The frustration only doubles when districts are then blamed for the failures they rightly predicted at the onset. Is it possible to put aside the politics, engage in authentic collaboration, and simply do what is best for the children of Oklahoma? So far, the answer to this question appears to be a resounding "no," and as a result, I am joined by educators and parents across the state in experiencing a loss of confidence in the leadership of the State Department of Education.

Finally, I want to *again* extend my assistance to you and your staff in an effort to positively reform public education in Oklahoma. A state with a successful, efficient public education system cannot help but experience improvements in other areas that enhance citizens' quality of life. As the superintendent of Oklahoma's sixth largest school district, I stand ready to offer you my assistance and advice, as does the team of professional educators who work to make every day a success for the 17,028 students we serve in Broken Arrow Public Schools.

Respectfully,



Jarod Mendenhall, Ed.D.
Superintendent, Broken Arrow Public Schools