



# Special Edition

# **ACTION**

Affiliated with NEA and KEA

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JEFFERSON COUNTY TEACHERS ASSOCIATION

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1941 Bishop Lane, Suite 300, Louisville, KY 40218 • 454-3400 • 452-2794 (fax) • www.jcta.org • Feb. 2016

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*Below are the remarks made by JCTA member Ryan Davis a teacher at Central HS, to the JCPS Board of Education on Tuesday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>. Ryan has worked diligently at Central HS to organize his colleagues to reduce redundant and unnecessary testing.*

My name is Ryan Davis. I'm a teacher at Central High school.

I want to first say that I appreciate the Board calendaring time to continue to work towards its goal of reducing multiple choice testing. To that end, I'm here today to present a petition asking the Board to exercise its authority in assessment to discontinue district practice of Proficiency testing. The petition has been signed by myself and every teacher in my building who is required to give these tests.

Personally, I'm passionate about working toward the district's already defined goals of deeper learning, personalized learning, and an increased professional capacity of teachers. But, I've seen Proficiency testing hinder our ability to progress toward those goals.

So, while the aphorism "What get measured, gets done" is often used to support such testing, if we accept it as true, we must then ask what Proficiency testing as a required measurement is actually getting done in our schools.

At the most basic level, this begins by determining what is being measured. Proficiency tests consist primarily of multiple choice questions that engender a low level, rote definition of knowledge and learning. "What gets measured, gets done"

When the Proficiency tests do the measuring, what gets done is a narrowing and shallowing of expectation and content that moves us further away from a goal of deeper learning.

This is not a problem that can be fixed with better Proficiency tests, because we must also consider the effects of the act of measurement itself. It's tempting to think of testing as non-invasive procedure. But, Proficiency assessments are more akin to the measuring the volume of an object by placing it in a glass of water and seeing how much is displaced.

"What gets measured, gets done"

Proficiency tests measure in a manner that encourages a shifting of the entire curriculum, often pushing the best parts out. They encourage a predetermined pace and sequence where instructional decisions become predicated NOT on the needs of a student, but on the needs of a test. They move us further from our goal of personalized instruction.

Finally, we must also consider how the results of the measurement are interpreted. As detailed in the petition, the design of these tests inevitably leads to convoluted and invalid results. Nevertheless, the results are often used as the sole judgments of how our students and school are doing. We are asked to make changes or address perceived deficits based on the results of these tests.

"What gets measured, gets done"

These measures result in a culture more reliant on a narrow, fallible test, than on a teacher's professional knowledge of content, pedagogy, and their individual students. They undermine attempts to build a culture based on our professional capacity.

Yet, as teachers, we push back, every day, against the forces of a system where Proficiency testing is the measure that drives what gets done. We push our students and our schools to work beyond the culture this system creates. We bring this petition to you today to ask for relief from these assessments, and to help us to align systems to work concert with our goals of deeper, more personalized learning, and work toward a culture that trusts and utilizes our professional capacity as teachers.



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## **JEFFERSON COUNTY BOARD OF EDUCATION PETITION TO DISCONTINUE MANDATORY PROFICIENCY TESTING**

We the undersigned respectfully request that the Board discontinue mandatory District Proficiency Testing for the reasons set forth below:

### **TESTING DOES NOT SUPPORT INSTRUCTION OR LEARNING**

We are all teachers experienced in conducting District mandated Diagnostic and Proficiency testing as required in the four areas of the math, science, English and social studies. Though district Proficiency and Diagnostic testing has existed for years, the rationale for its purpose and the authority behind its mandate have been nebulous at best and are frequently found to change. The district has already recognized the lack of test utility by its decision to discontinue mandatory Diagnostic testing, which was coupled with Proficiency testing since its inception.

Proficiency testing is administered without a defined purpose, is neither designated as formative nor summative, and is poorly designed in the scope and type of knowledge it assesses. Most significantly, Proficiency testing is not an effective formative assessment as it does not provide feedback to students or teachers that is meaningful for improving teaching or learning.

The multiple choice and open response questions are frequently poorly designed, and can vary greatly in difficulty, reading level, or required prior knowledge, thus confounding their usefulness, and therefore not meeting the JCPS core value of *excellence*. Continued use of multiple choice questions in these formats does not meet best practice in assessment that can move instruction forward, and does not meet the goal of reducing the use of multiple choice assessments.

### **A DISTRICT MANDATED TESTING SCHEDULE INTERFERES WITH INSTRUCTION**

The four cycles of testing are tied rigidly to the curriculum guide requiring testing that often conflicts with our professional judgment of student progress. Pacing according to testing often runs contrary to the instructional philosophies, such as of Mastery over Time, and interferes with teacher autonomy, *opportunity, and creativity*. SBDM has the responsibility for determining the school's curriculum. Teachers have the authority to determine the order, pacing, and assessment schedules within that curriculum. JCBE policy requires the teacher to develop a syllabus that outlines the order of instruction and materials and identifies the resources used for learning.

The Proficiency Testing schedule disregards the teacher's plans and forces teachers to organize instruction according to testing dates. JCBE policy requires District actions to *support* the curriculum used by schools and SBDM Councils in the development of local instructional decisions. A mandatory Proficiency testing schedule undermines the autonomy of SBDM Councils and teachers to guide instruction based upon their in-classroom judgments about student progress, pacing, and assessment. A mandatory Proficiency Testing schedule forces teachers to choose between teaching for test preparation and addressing instruction to the particular needs of students. Proficiency Testing inhibits the teacher's ability to *personalize learning*.

### **MANDATORY TESTING UNDERMINES HEALTHY SCHOOL CULTURE**

Proficiency test results foster unwarranted judgments of student performance and conversations about unjustified remedial work which are detrimental to building the confidence of learners and school culture. The time to administer the test, to prepare for the test, for administrator feedback of test results, to debrief and address student concerns, and the time required to develop individual remedial plans for perceived shortcomings all drain essential time away from the actual educational process shaped by the teacher's daily experience with students. The testing pushes classroom structure and school culture away from one focused on *deeper learning* and toward a focus on passing a test.

### **MANDATORY DISTRICT TESTING SHOULD BE DISCONTINUED**

It is our collective professional judgment that the continued use of Proficiency Testing does not meet the Kentucky Department of Education standard of Educational Defensibility. The authority for policies on the assessment of student progress lie with the Board, not SBDM Councils or District officials. We request this Board act to assure that mandatory District testing does not undermine or conflict with the responsibilities delegated to teachers and SBDM Councils to accomplish effective instruction at the level of our individual schools, or impair the autonomy necessary to that purpose.

We, the undersigned, ask that the Board of Education: 1) discontinue the current Proficiency testing regimen; 2) reaffirm that JCBE policy is controlling on issues of assessment, and 3) institute a new policy that (a) limits the number of district created assessments to one per course, not to exceed one hour in length and (b) specifies that the decisions of whether to administer assessments, or when to administer any such assessments, are at the discretion of the classroom teacher.



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