

Press Clippings 5/5/2022

Chicago Tribune

Illinois educators, union leaders demand end to U-46 to ‘weaponized’ standardized student testing: ‘This is a racist relic of the past’ --- 5/4/2022

By Karen Ann Cullotta

With the state expected to unveil a new standardized testing program in the coming months, educators, union leaders and parents have joined forces to oppose more frequent interim assessments, which they say would waste valuable classroom instruction time and offer no benefits to student learning.

“We have a testing regime that has gone too far and is not helping children learn, it’s not helping educators teach, especially right now, post-COVID, when the needs of our students’ recovery are great and pressing ... especially for our more underprivileged students,” Dan Montgomery, president of the Illinois Federation of Teachers, said at a union-sponsored virtual discussion last week.

Montgomery said during the union’s recent tour of Illinois schools, teachers across the state said they are grappling with helping students through crisis recovery, “And the testing has to stop. It’s getting in the way of teaching.”

Illinois State Board of Education Superintendent Carmen Ayala was not immediately available for comment Tuesday.

Earlier this year, the state hired the New Hampshire-based nonprofit Center for Assessment to analyze the results of a statewide survey about how to make the state assessment more useful to families and educators, including the possibility of halting the annual Illinois Assessment of Readiness and testing students several times a year, to better gauge learning gaps.

An ISBE spokesperson said in a Tuesday email that officials have asked the [State Assessment Review Committee](#), which includes parents and educators from around the state, to evaluate the Center for Assessment report.

“Once we receive their feedback and recommendations, the Board will consider that input and assess how to move forward,” ISBE officials said.

ISBE officials are considering [replacing the state’s annual student assessment](#) with interim testing throughout the school year, including an option to test children as young as kindergarten.



Dual language teacher Sara Balbas Altes teaches math to fourth graders at **Lords Park Elementary School** on March 24, 2022, in Elgin. Fourth graders enrolled in the dual language program at Lords Park would need to sit for state assessments at least three times a year under an Illinois State Board of Education proposal that is facing opposition from educators, including some at **Elgin-based Unit School District 46**. (Stacey Wescott / Chicago Tribune)

There is not yet a specific proposal under consideration, and any changes to the current IAR would have to be allowed by federal law and approved by the U.S. Department of Education, ISBE officials said.

Among the foes of expanded testing is Chicago Teachers Union President Jesse Sharkey, who said Tuesday that the standardized assessments “deny qualified Black and brown students access to a fully adequate education, disinvest in and close schools in communities of color, and dismantle Black and brown neighborhoods anchored by long-neglected schools.”

“Instead, our students need the resources to unpack and recover from the trauma of the pandemic and the decades of inequity that preceded it,” Sharkey said in a statement. “Replacing costly, harmful standardized testing with truly nurturing and supportive classroom learning time is a step in the right direction.”

Paul Zavitkovsky with the Center for Urban Education Leadership at the University of Illinois at Chicago questioned why the state is paying roughly \$50 million a year to testing companies when researchers say there’s no data showing standardized tests improve student learning.

Educators, researchers and parents are united in their belief that there is a distinction between a federally required standardized test and the kinds of assessments that can actually improve teaching and learning, Zavitkovsky said.

The state survey also found a strong interest in minimizing the amount of time for testing, and increasing the quality and timeliness of the reporting on spring assessment results, which typically arrive too late for teachers to use the data to support students, who are by then no longer in their classrooms.

“We don’t get any useful information out of this stuff at all, and it takes an enormous amount of time out of instruction for us to do it,” Zavitkovsky said.

Chicago Public Schools teacher Aaron Bingea expressed alarm at the prospect of the state moving to an interim student testing model that would replace annual exams with testing three times a year, in the fall, winter and spring. In his experience at city schools, frequent, through-year testing — which the district has since eliminated — was disruptive and ineffective, he said.

“Students lost art, PE, science and social studies to test prep,” Bingea said, adding that the district’s focus on tracking data and aiming for maximum growth in reading and math ended up hitting hardest for schools deemed underperforming.

“The stress cannot be overstated ... at elementary schools, everything comes to a grinding halt,” Bingea said.

“Any momentum developed in your learning community that you work so hard for as a teacher is immediately broken every time you have to give a state standardized test,” he said. “To think the state is considering doing this three times a year is something that really worries me.”

After the frequent testing was halted, Bingea said he was able to “know where students are based on the curriculum assessments I’ve been trained to give.”

John Essington, a professor of teacher education at Blackburn College in Carlinville, Illinois, and a father of three children, said he had his children opt out of state testing because after years of teaching, “I know it’s not actually helping my kids at all.”

And as the parent of a child with text anxiety, Essington said he knows that standardized test scores offer a snapshot that does not accurately reflect a student’s academic abilities.

“It’s all about accountability; it’s not about growth for the students,” Essington said.

A longtime critic of standardized testing, state Sen. Cristina Pacione-Zayas, a Democrat from Chicago, said high-stakes testing has an adverse impact on children, as well as the educators who have to stop teaching their students to administer the tests.

“This is a racist relic of the past,” said Pacione-Zayas, [sponsor of a “Too Young to Test” bill](#), which was recently passed by the General Assembly and is currently awaiting Gov. J.B. Pritzker’s signature.

If signed into law, the measure would prohibit standardized tests for Illinois’ youngest students, except for the case of diagnostic tests, including determining eligibility for special education services, bilingual services, dyslexia interventions, observational tools like the federally mandated English Learner assessments and the Kindergarten Individual Development Survey.

“(Standardized testing has) served to keep groups out of institutions and we know that the value, the validity in our education system of using these assessment systems is highly questionable, and we know it’s highly profitable for a \$7.6 billion industry,” Pacione-Zayas said.

While the State Board of Education was slated to vote last June on a request for proposals to design and deliver new interim assessments for elementary school students, the plan was put on hold to give educators and parents more time to weigh in, officials said at the time.

For decades, educators and parents have been critical of the annual, federally required assessment of students’ math, reading and language arts skills, which is delivered statewide to children in third through eighth grades near the end of the school year, with the test results posted each fall on the Illinois Report Card.

ISBE officials have said the interim assessment plan is being considered in an effort to improve the oft-criticized IAR testing program and to enhance equity for students and school districts.

In a recent survey of 5,000 teachers and parents, when asked, “Do you support a state assessment system characterized by multiple short tests throughout the year instead of a single, long end-of-year test?” approximately 60% said yes, 20% said no, and 20% were undecided, ISBE officials said.

In addition, 75% of respondents said they are not satisfied with the current state assessment.

ISBE officials said the majority of the state’s more than 850 school districts are already doing interim assessments for students and paying for the programs themselves.

“Offering the assessment to districts for free from the state would save districts money, allow underfunded districts the same opportunity to access student growth data prior to third grade, and ensure alignment to the assessment for grades three through eight,” ISBE spokeswoman Jackie Matthews said earlier this year.

A common complaint about the IAR, held in spring, is that test results are not released to teachers until fall, when their students are no longer in their classrooms. ISBE officials have said interim testing would yield “more timely and actionable results to families and teachers.”

Monique Redeaux-Smith is the IFT’s director of union professional issues and led the recent educators’ discussion about standardized testing and the future of the state’s student assessment program. She said many parents and teachers across Illinois in the throes of the pandemic were “horrified” to learn the state board was considering an interim assessment plan.

“It goes beyond what is federally required and increases high-stakes testing, again placing an even heavier burden on Black communities,” Redeaux-Smith said.

A “Teach not Test” campaign, launched by the IFT, CTU, researchers and education groups across the state, is opposed to ISBE increasing testing in Illinois schools in grades three through eight. The campaign is not merely to push back against interim testing, but to “really put forth a vision for the kind of balanced and humane assessment system that we do want to see,” she said.

“Now is the time to reimagine our current testing system and move to an actual assessment system,” Redeaux-Smith said. “For us, an equitable assessment system is not every district getting access to the same test, but it’s about every student having the opportunity to see themselves and their knowledge and expertise reflected in the curriculum.”

Daily Herald

Larkin earns new traveling trophy --- 5/4/2022

By Jared Birchfield, Daily Herald Correspondent

Elgin and **Larkin** will need to make room in their trophy cases for another traveling prize -- The Golden Glove.

The award will go to winner of the yearly series between the two softball teams

The Royals will be guardians for the trophy's inaugural year after beating the Maroons, 10-0 Wednesday on their home diamond to sweep the 2-game series.

Larkin took control of the Upstate Eight Conference game with a 7 run second inning.

Elgin starting pitcher Madison King got her Larkin opposite, Chelsea Herrick, to line out to shortstop Monica Martinez to start the frame. Julissa Aguinaga followed with a single to left but was thrown out by Elgin's freshman catcher Alice Sondergaard trying to steal second during Angelica Gonzalez' at bat.

Gonzalez reached second base when Elgin misplayed her flyball in the outfield to start the rally. After Alanis Ortega walked, Camila Alonzo rapped a singled to center to score Gonzalez for the first run.

The next five batters all got on base by either a walk, a single or an error and pushed runners across the plate. Herrick plated the last two runs on her second at-bat of the inning on a fielding miscue.

Larkin (12-5, 8-4) added three more runs in the fifth to end the game on the 10-run rule.

"We didn't particularly really string together any hits. We hit a ball hard a couple of times that's pretty much it. We got on base a little extra with walks today," said Larkin coach Anne Vogt. "We capitalized on any mistakes that they made and got our 10 runs."

"I told the girls after game that get rid of that one error in the second inning and that's eight extra batters Madison didn't have to pitch to and that would have been a difference between being 7-0 and 0-0," Elgin coach Monica Stockman said. "Madison has been throwing very well this season."

Herrick retired the first eight batters she faced, giving up the first of three singles in the third inning.

Elgin (2-16, 1-11) threatened in the fifth, the only inning it had a runner in scoring position. Martinez opened the inning with a single to right and advance to second two batters later on a fielding miscue. She was forced out at third on Lizbet Gomez' grounder to the shortstop for the second out. Kathleen Bautista ended the inning with a groundout to second base.

"My job is to put the ball in the strike zone and if it gets hit, I trust my defense to get it for me," Herrick said. "I was throwing a lot of fastballs and curveballs. A curveball is my best pitch and that's what I used to get most of my batters out."

As for the Golden Glove, Vogt said Stockman deserves much of the credit.

"This is the first year that we've started doing this. There's a couple of things that get exchanged with Elgin. The boys have the jug for football," Vogt said. "(Stockman) put it together. I give her all the credit. We collaborated a little bit on it, but she did all the hard work. We will take it this year and see what happens next year."