

## Wendy Lecker: Will one superintendent please stand up?

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Is there a Connecticut school superintendent who will stand up for children? Is there one who will speak truth to power?

Last week, Charlotte-Mecklenburg's superintendent, Heath Morrison, labeled North Carolina's new barrage of standardized testing an "egregious waste of taxpayer dollars." He explained that these tests take too much time from teaching and cannot improve teaching or learning. Morrison noted that, "[w]e can teach our way to the top, but we cannot test our way to the top."

Morrison joins former Stamford Superintendent Josh Starr, who currently runs the Montgomery County, Md., school district. Starr has called for a three-year moratorium on standardized testing, noting that districts are being asked to implement too many reforms at once. He also calls for an end to the "insanity" of evaluating teachers based on test scores, which he correctly describes as "bad science."

These leaders are not alone. In Texas, Superintendent John Kuhn has been a steady voice opposing the emptiness of test-centric policies. Kuhn decries the "outsized influence of test-makers, statisticians, and economists on modern educational decision-making." Like his colleagues in Maryland and North Carolina, Kuhn calls for a rethinking of the testing culture sweeping our nation, remarking that "we are so busy raising test scores that we are forgetting to raise children."

Closer to home, Kenneth Mitchell, a superintendent in Rockland County, N.Y., authored a report concluding that the cost of that state's Race to the Top grant will be more than the federal government will provide and implementing it will mean deep cuts to other, more important programs. He also raised serious questions about the research base for the Race to the Top initiatives, most notably the plan to evaluate teachers on test scores. Mitchell warns that if New York does not slow down to validate the basis of these initiatives prior to implementing them, the state runs the risk of "funding a grand and costly experiment that has the potential to take public education in the wrong direction."

These are some of the superintendents brave enough to stand up for what is right in education. They spend their lives in public schools and understand what will help children develop. They craft budgets every year and, especially in these tough economic times, must make difficult decisions about what resources are essential to advance that goal. And from Texas to Maryland to North Carolina to New York, they consistently maintain that the increase in standardized testing that is overtaking this country is destructive to our schools, our budgets and our children.

These individuals are not supporters of the "status quo." They are all deeply committed to improving

educational outcomes, but they believe in a thoughtful, measured and evidence-based approach to education policies. They understand that, for the students in public schools now, those who are currently the subjects of politicians' experimental whims, there is no second chance at a good education.

Connecticut is following the same dangerous path to nowhere that states across the country are traveling. Our leaders insist on vastly increasing the amount of standardized tests: by implementing the Common Core State Standards, which call for an unknown number of tests; and by basing every teacher's evaluation at least in part on a standardized test. They have committed the state to these goals without even knowing what standardized tests will be involved. What we do know is that children in every grade and every subject will soon have to suffer through more and more standardized tests, many of which will be administered and scored on a computer. Already in Bridgeport and Hartford, they have replaced three to four weeks of teaching and learning with standardized testing.

Many Connecticut teachers, administrators and parents agree with those courageous superintendents across the country. They know that this road our state is forcing us to take will not help children and will divert needed resources away from teaching and learning.

Where is one brave and honest Connecticut superintendent? Will one of our educational leaders explain to our politicians that the over-emphasis on testing runs the risk of bankrupting our state fiscally and, more importantly, bankrupting us educationally? One leader can start the New Year and the new legislative session by guiding those in Hartford to develop substantive policies that make sense for our children rather than empty policies that only make for good sound bites. All we need is one. With one speaking the truth, the rest will have a clear path to follow.

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