

Greetings on this wonderful Homecoming Friday! The school is a “buzz” with many activities tonight and tomorrow – Homecoming festivities, Friday night football, and the 1996 class reunion tonight. Tomorrow the cross country team will travel to the Van Buren Invite, while volleyball will host their annual Invite. In the evening SOS is hosting a Mother/Son night and later we will host the annual Homecoming Dance. Welcome back to all the Hornet Alumni and Go Hornets!

Since my last update I’ve had a few questions from parents and community members about the Report Card, the ESSA Waiver, and the overall state of education. While I can’t answer everything here I thought it might be helpful to provide some questions and answers for your knowledge.

Q: If, as you say, the State Report Card is unreliable why does the State keep publishing it?

A: While I can’t provide a full answer on the state’s behalf, the Ohio Department of Education (ODE) is required by law to provide the Report Card to meet requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and, now, Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). ODE actually does not have a choice in whether or not they release the Report Card because the legislature made the law that requires they do so. My point to politicians and to ODE has been that they required it – they can also either put it in hiatus until they get their act together (rather than sending out something that is not ready and not a good reflection of what schools are actually doing) or they also have the power to revise the Report Card to incorporate more meaningful measures that make sense for students, schools, and communities.

As I previously indicated in my updates, we never shy away from accountability – please do not ever infer that from my statements. We should absolutely be held accountable – but it should be an equitable and reliable accountability measure that makes sense and, more importantly, drives improvement rather than penalizing schools and students. In 3 years our students have faced 3 different tests. Students are, mostly, adaptable, but behind the scenes our teachers and administration must adjust curriculum, teaching methodology, and resources to target these tests. While it’s always bad business to have a moving target, I think it’s even worse to have to teach to “the test”. Here’s where the ODE and I do agree – the test should be a measure of the content students have learned over time; however, the state has implemented 3 versions because they realized that the previous versions did not do that. Does the latest version succeed? Probably better than most, but the verdict is still out. In the meantime, though, our students have tested through different versions while the State tries to “get it right”. Again, though, the legislature has forced ODE’s hand and has not provided them an appropriate timeline to fully develop and implement these tests.

Q: Does Cory-Rawson utilize local testing measures that are more reliable?

A: Yes and no...we do, but we have been limited in their use because, frankly, if we fully implemented them our students would be far more over-tested than they already are. When the OAA and OGT tests first came about under NCLB many scholars remarked “you can’t make a pig fatter by weighing it” to infer that simply testing students would not make them smarter. Certainly, testing can tell you if students are learning (or weighing a pig can tell you if a certain diet is working); however, the idea was that we would be able to measure student learning. Now, though, we are under conditions where testing takes educational time away from the classroom and it is the driving force behind instruction. Students, in general – statewide, have their education impacted by this constant influx of testing. The federal and state government have overlooked or ignored the fact that schools can and do utilize local testing (norm-

referenced, research-based reliable tests which provide trend data) to measure student progress and to inform their instruction. However, if we utilized this local testing to its fullest potential it would overwhelm the educational system with non-stop testing. If, however, ODE and the legislature write our ESSA waiver to allow for minimum testing (as allowed by the Federal Government) we could see a decrease in state testing which would still provide necessary progress measures and accountability while allowing schools to do what they do best – educate our students.

Q: I know you provided us with contact info for our legislators and the state board representative, but I don't know all the details of the ESSA. What can/should I say to them if I contact them?

A: First, I must state that your contact with legislators and representatives is imperative! They all know my perspective on this and that of hundreds of other school superintendents. They hear from us often and our position has not changed. To make a difference they must absolutely hear from you. If you think that your one voice doesn't make a difference just think about how many other people might be thinking the same and their opinion also goes unvoiced. It takes a bunch of individual people to voice their opinion and make a difference!

As for what to say...well, that depends on your opinion which may or may not be the same as mine. From what I have heard from the community through discussion or from the survey completed last school year is that you want more local control, that you don't like so much testing, and that you believe in what Cory-Rawson is providing for your children. You don't need to know all the details of the ESSA (it's quite a lengthy document by the way...I'm not sure I know it all either!) – what you do need to know is what's important to you. The current situation with the ODE needing to write a plan to meet the requirements of ESSA allows for an opportunity for your voice to make a real impact. If you agree with the sentiments above then simply relay that in a call or email to your representatives. Tell them that you want more local control, less mandated testing, and an accountability system that makes sense, measures what schools are truly doing, provides for school improvement, and doesn't change every year.