

APS policy/legislative action plan

Submitted by Jill Cullis

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I am asking APS to take the legislative/policy lead and be the shining city on the hill for education. Good enough should not be... good enough. We can do better. We are at a crossroads as a state with the implementation of additional years of testing. We as teachers are weary from pulling out all of the stops to motivate students only to have those students put forth very little effort on test days. We are broken-hearted when we are held 100% accountable for students test scores while they sleep for four days. Furthermore, we are forbidden from engaging them during the test to take it seriously.

If we are able to raise test scores in the district then property values will increase. If we are able to raise property values then APS we will receive a greater amount of tax revenue. If we increase our tax revenue then we are able to decrease class size, and provide greater resources where needed... etc....

What can we lose by being a pioneer in this venue? If APS takes the lead then we would become the darling of educators for the entire state. If educators throughout the state see APS as taking the lead and supporting teachers in this manner then more teachers would apply to work for Aurora Schools. If we increase the number of teachers in our applicant pool then we have a wider range of qualified educators and staff members from which to hire. If we improved test scores then our community's image and staff morale would greatly improve. If we improve test scores then the entire state would look to APS as the role model for education.

There are answers to be had and no one solution will be sufficient. For ever suggestion there are easily 100+ reasons why it cannot be accomplished. However, great solutions and compromises do not come easy. We can and we must do better. My/our community needs us to take the lead.

Nothing changes until something moves

1. Question: What if students cared about TCAP/CMAStest scores as much as real estate brokers do? (Both residential and business).

2. Issue: There is not student accountability on the tests. Students and parents see no value in doing well. There is virtually no reason for a student to care about the test. For so many there is no intrinsic value in doing anything more than bubbling in Christmas trees in the circles.

3. Reality:

I have had **students** tell me the following as only a few examples:

A. "Ms. Cullis, I don't give a (explicative) about the test and you can't make me care. "

B. "I am sick of taking the tests"

C. "I am only here so I don't get in trouble for ditching. Just let me sleep."

I even had a **parent** say the following:

A. "It is not my_kid's job to make you look good."

B. "I am taking my child on vacation; it is a great time for our family to be together."

4. Solutions:

A. What are the "carrot" and "stick" approaches to motivating students at all grade level and academic achievement? Meaning, we need to motivate the college bound *and* those who will enter the work force.

B. What are the "carrot" and "stick" approaches to engage parents in their child's scores/education as a whole? "Legislating parenting" is not what I have in mind, but we all know that when parents are engaged their students have a greater likelihood of achieving increased scores.

C. Other Possible Solutions- we need to be creative.

Authentic legislative/policy reality: I realize there are NO easy solutions. Remember the legislative fight a couple of years ago when the legislature tackled the retention of 3rd graders if they were not at grade level? I have no doubt that potential innovative legislation will indeed be the same, but we all know that regarding human nature if consequences are not **SEEN and FELT** nothing will change. Legislation is the only answer to put teeth behind our action. I understand with every suggested solution there is a "NO WAY" that will be declared, but we must not let this stop us from doing what is right for APS teachers and students.

Possible solutions:

A. Differentiated diplomas

B. Withholding student driver licenses/permits

C. Limiting the ability of a parent to renew their driver's license.

D. Basic score required for graduation- I am aware that at least Texas and New York follow have laws requiring this.

E. Withholding work permits if students are not proficient.

F. Granting an automatic "A" on the transcript if the student scores advanced or a "B" if they score proficient, regardless of the grade achieved in class.

G. Engaging business in the community that rely upon our families for their income – (such as the Aurora Mall) to pay students a dollar (s) for every point increased from one year to the next.

H. Meet with Aurora Chamber of Commerce about engaging businesses for their support.

I. Mail to parents a one page, easy to read, color report of their child's test results. Green to represent proficient, Red to represent unsatisfactory or partially proficient etc... This report should also reflect their child's areas of growth or decline using up and down arrows.

J. With the said report in above (E) parents are given a tax credit (X number of dollars) for each point their child gains academically. This report must be submitted when mailing their Colorado tax forms to receive tax credit.

K. Do not punish a school school/district for a parental decision to opt their child out.

L. There are many other solutions to be had, but we must be proactive and creative for change to occur.

Getting answers:

A. Survey teachers for their thoughts of what motivational tactics would work.

B. Survey students for why they have done so poorly on tests.

C. Survey parents of what they believe would motivate their student.

D. Engage other districts to discuss solutions and engage their policy makers.

E. Write policy (s) for APS to engage students and parents.

E. With survey results make a presentation for legislative action to legislators for the 2015 legislative session.

In Conclusion: Do we want our students sweating the tests because they matter or sleeping because they do not?

My/our community needs us to take the lead.

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