

March 19, 2014

Re: SUPPORT HB5330 and HA1

Establish Commission to Review Use of Standardized Tests

Parents United for Responsible Education urges you to support HB5330 which would provide some stakeholder oversight to the excessive use and misuse of standardized tests in our schools.

PURE believes that standardized tests have taken over public education to the extent that far too many precious hours, days and weeks of the school year are now given over to test drill, test preparation, and testing, while our children are being deprived of important subjects, activities and experiences that are critical to a well-rounded education. We believe that much of this drive to increase testing is due to multinational publishing empires eager to expand their markets.

Chicago Public Schools leads the pack in overtesting, this year giving multiple administrations of multiple standardized tests, many just to determine how students will do on other standardized tests. Parents who have objected to this misuse and overuse of tests have been subjected to coercion and intimidation. It is time to step back and take a hard look at what testing is doing to our children and their education, and what tests we really need.

This bill would provide several benefits and help empower parents and others in the school community by providing some stakeholder evaluation and oversight of standardized testing.

Re: SUPPORT HB4591

Charter school tuition repayment

Parents United for Responsible Education urges you to support HB4591 which would require charter schools to repay on a pro rated basis the student tuition the charter school has collected for students who subsequently leave the charter school. We feel that this is only fair since many students who leave charter schools return to their neighborhood schools whose resources may be shrinking in part due to the diversion of public school funds to charter schools.

We also believe that there must be consequences for the all-too-common charter school practice of pushing out students they consider less desirable, such as students who score lower on standardized tests or students needing extra support.

This bill would provide several benefits and help empower parents by giving them a tool to challenge charter school push-outs.

Parents United for Responsible Education

11 E. Adams Street Suite 1401 Chicago, IL 60603 Tel. 312/491-9101 pure@pureparents.org www.pureparents.org

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**Re: SUPPORT HB5328
Strengthen Local Control of Schools**

Parents United for Responsible Education urges you to support HB5328 which would strengthen local control of our schools, a strategy that has proven to improve struggling schools far more effectively than top-down intervention.

We particularly support the provisions of HB5328 that:

- 1) Require local school councils (LSCs) at all charter, small and alternative schools. Over the years, Chicago Public Schools has undermined and marginalized LSCs in many ways, including re-labeling schools in order to disband their LSCs. We know that many parents of student in charter and other non-traditional public schools can feel that they have no say in what happens at their children's schools. Their problems are often not resolved and instead parents are simply told to leave the school. LSC oversight and accountability would empower parents and strengthen all schools and communities.
- 2) Maintain LSC authority even in struggling schools. Research shows that struggling schools with LSCs improved far more than low-performing schools where CPS intervened and took over the LSC role. It is far better to work with and support a school's parents, teachers and community, adding to rather than detracting from the social supports these schools so desperately need.
- 3) Place LSC training and removal of ineligible LSC members under an independent LSC Certification commission, and provide adequate funding for LSC training. Over the years, CPS inattention and lack of support for LSCs has eroded the quality and accessibility of LSC training, which is also no longer financially supported by the local foundation community as it was in the early days of schools reform. Yet well-trained and well-supported LSCs are the best school reform strategy we can have.
- 4) Addition of an LSC role for one 7th or 8th grade student on elementary school LSCs. Students this age can certainly contribute to LSC work, and this is an excellent and educational way to introduce young people to the democratic process.

This bill would provide several benefits and help empower parents and others in the school community by strengthening local school council operations, which in turn will strengthen our schools.

Thank you.

Julie Woestehoff
PURE executive director

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