

February 20, 2005

Dear Legislator,

We represent a group of test-weary parents and community members concerned for our schools and for the future of our children. Before Senate Bill 186 was introduced in 2000, important policy decisions were deferred to professional educators and administrators trained and committed to the education of our children.

Since the recent reform initiatives our schools are being driven by standardized tests and the Colorado State Assessment Program (CSAP.) The curriculum is being narrowed to test concepts, excluding critical topics in history, civics, and science. Teaching is focused on memorization and simple single solutions, minimizing the process of critical thinking and in-depth reasoning.

Test scores are improving but children are reading and writing less and achievement in other important areas is on the decline. Our state's graduation rate has also dropped since we've instituted the high-stakes practice of testing every child and grading schools based on the results of those tests.

It is our feeling that the CSAP is over-used and misused, infecting classrooms and corrupting schools. McGraw-Hill and the CSAP have never been independently evaluated or analyzed for accuracy or reliability. The test is expensive and incredibly time consuming. Some schools spend three months preparing for the test and other schools have replaced their curriculum resources with test preparation guides used throughout the year.

Our children are bored and unengaged. They are finding that learning has become trivialized and that their education is no longer for the purpose of discovering the world and their place in it. Schools have become a battleground for corporate gain, political agendas, and special interest attempts to subsidize private tuition.

Opportunity is by far the best predictor of achievement and yet our current reforms and accountability system diminish opportunity especially where it is needed most. We wonder what would have happened to Albert Einstein, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., or Helen Keller had their academic training been reduced to standards and "measured performance" on multiple choice and short answer tests.

We want our schools back, we want our teachers empowered again, we want our children to run off to school excited about learning and returning home more prepared for the world we live in. It's not a perfect system, but we believe our children are better off in the hands of professionally trained and committed teachers, then in the clutches of profit seeking test publishers, political rhetoric, and greedy fundamentalists.

We ask that you restore local control, discontinue the practice of labeling schools, reduce or put an end to standardized testing, stop evaluating schools based on test scores, create equitable and adequate funding, and cultivate conditions that engender responsibility for learning and promote meaningful and lasting opportunities for teachers and students.