

Op-Ed from May 10, 2010  
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## Response to Editorial “Dumping Tests Alone Won’t Fix Education” Editorial

As a reader of newspapers, I think I understand the job of the editorial staff—kind of like the editorial staff seems to think they understand the work of teachers because they attended school. I have assessed the recent opinion pieces on the issue of tying teacher evaluation to student outcomes and the relative merits of the SBA. As an educator judging journalists, I’d have to give them a “below standards” rating on their understanding of the issues.

If you’ve been following the back and forth about New Mexico’s application for the federal funds called Race to the Top, you may be confused about the issues. And, based on the editorial that contends “the wrong kind of deal” with the teachers and their unions might be “fatal” you might also be confused about what teachers stand for and stand against. The best place to start is the question from the editorial staff: “So, why is SBA all of a sudden so flawed as to be unusable?”

Thanks for asking! As educators, we can answer that question.

The Journal article seemed to say that teachers and their unions want the wrong kind of test, rather than better tests. I want to assure the editors and readers that this is far from the truth. Actually, teachers want more rigorous assessments of what students know and are able to do.

The discussion of the failings of the SBA and similar standardized tests is not “sudden”. There is growing nationwide consensus that standardized tests are severely lacking. Educational testing is a complicated issue and all educators share the concern that our current tests are inadequate and not suited to the educational process our students deserve.

A recent column from a journalist who understands the issues deeply, Catherine Gewertz, from Education Week, states in the headline, “Rules Urge New Style of Testing”. “. . . Rules for the contest make it clear that the government wants to leave behind multiple-choice testing more often in favor of essays, multidisciplinary projects, and other more nuanced measures of achievement . . . the U.S. Department of Education says that it seeks assessments that ‘more validly measure’ students’ knowledge and skills than those that have come to dominate state testing.”

With a little more background, the Journal can see that it’s not just teachers and their unions who know that if higher stakes are to be based on these tests, then each state and

our nation as a whole must invest in better measures.

Investment means money. Let's talk about the reality of the Race to the Top money that is generating these questions. Race to the Top offers New Mexico \$75 million over four years. Per year, that is less than 1% of the total amount of money the state spends on public education. That won't buy much for New Mexico's students. That money won't even fill in the current hole in education funding created by cutting \$112 million since 2008-09.

So, here is our Race to the Top reality. It is our job to create fair and better ways to measure teacher effectiveness as part of the terms to receive that \$75 million. No doubt it is encouraging that New Mexico stakeholders will unify and compete against other states in an effort to win much-needed funding. The Albuquerque Teachers Federation will do everything possible to help our state succeed.

But if our final product is truly worth implementing, it will require a substantial investment on the part of the state. Yes, winning round two would be a prestigious honor; it would highlight our deep commitment to education, the students who learn in our schools and the teachers who teach in them. But, the financial impact would be small and the money would end after four years. Just as in the case of using stimulus funding to balance our state budget, we will eventually have to restore funding just to maintain the small amount of money we receive.

So, here are my questions to the Journal. Do you really think we should be racing into yesterday with inadequate measures of student learning and insufficient funding for our schools? Or, will the Journal continue to advocate for changes we embed in our Race to the Top application, even if it takes the biggest financial investment in our schools in our state's history?

Oh, and keep those questions coming!