

ACHIEVING EQUITY THROUGH CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE, BALANCED ASSESSMENT SYSTEMS

Submitted by: IFT P-20 Educational Policy Committee

1 **WHEREAS**, from 2005-2015 alone, Illinois spent over \$315 million on high-stakes standardized
2 testing, and in response, school districts directed millions of local dollars and a countless
3 number of instructional hours toward “benchmark” or “interim” tests and mandated test-prep
4 activities, yet the information provided by these high-stakes tests has been misused, thus
5 making them ineffectual in providing real and meaningful guidance to teachers, students and
6 families (Zavitskovsky, Roarty and Swanson 2016); and
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8 **WHEREAS**, high-stakes standardized tests have been used for over two decades to blame,
9 shame and penalize schools, teachers, and students, in particular, students of color; and
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11 **WHEREAS**, test prep has drained instructional time, student and teacher energy, and school
12 funds from schools already underfunded and under resourced, while also narrowing school
13 curricula, stripping away teacher autonomy, eroding the love of teaching and learning and
14 fostering hostile, antagonistic school climates, particularly in schools serving Black and
15 Brown students and students from lower income families (National Center for Fair and Open
16 Testing, Koretz 2017, Nelson 2013); and
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18 **WHEREAS**, for more than 20 years, our nation has generated student, family and educator
19 stress and anxiety by administering high stakes, large-scale standardized tests to collect
20 data, which has not improved teaching and learning conditions or equity; and
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22 **WHEREAS**, the overreliance on lengthy standardized tests for accountability has been amply
23 demonstrated to cause negative physical and mental harms to students of all ages by
24 inducing toxic stress, with these impacts being most profound among our most vulnerable
25 students, and contributing to the school-to-prison pipeline, as a test-prep culture undermines
26 student engagement and increases negative student behavior, thus leading students,
27 particularly students of color and those with disabilities, being pushed out of school, thereby
28 increasing the likelihood for interaction with police and law enforcement (National Center for
29 Fair and Open Testing, Koretz 2017, Kohn 2015, Ravitch 2010); and
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31 **WHEREAS**, students in Special Education are already subjected to additional progress
32 monitoring and testing which takes away from valuable learning time; and
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34 **WHEREAS**, students who are English Learners are forced to take standardized tests only in
35 English regardless of their level of English proficiency, in addition to the Assessing
36 Comprehension and Communication in English State-to-State for English Language
37 Learners (ACCESS) testing; and
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39 **WHEREAS**, systemic inequities in public education have widened educational opportunity gaps,
40 since students from disadvantaged groups are more likely to attend schools with far less
41 funding and course-work offerings; experience significantly higher instructional hours
42 devoted to test prep; and face increased threat of restructuring and/or closure and high
43 teacher/principal turnover (Journey for Justice Alliance *Failing Brown v. Board* 2017); and
44

45 **WHEREAS**, vendors and education “reform” groups not representing practitioners have
46 successfully pushed policies and products that attempt to “teacher proof” public education
47 by promoting and expanding large-scale standardized testing tied to narrow curriculum
48 pacing guides over teachers’ professional knowledge, skills and experience to design,
49 deliver and reflect on culturally responsive curriculum, instruction and assessment; and

WHEREAS, effective classroom assessment practices are founded in culturally responsive teaching, curriculum, and assessment—and supported by school and district leaders, states, teacher educators and measurement experts—so that students experience an equity-focused learning environment that recognizes and builds on their culture, knowledge and experience and ensures authentic instructional and assessment tasks provide feedback to support students’ learning and growth¹; and

WHEREAS, classroom-based, curriculum-embedded formative assessment is the “lived, daily embodiment of a teacher’s desire to refine practice based on a keener understanding of current levels of student performance, undergirded by the teacher’s knowledge of possible paths of student development within the discipline and of pedagogies that support such development.”²; and

WHEREAS, a balanced assessment system represents a comprehensive, coherent and continuous use of curriculum-embedded, unit-based formative and summative assessments in the classroom to better understand student learning, layered with school and district assessment systems, and state accountability tests to inform the overall educational process (Marion and Shepard 2021); and

WHEREAS, extensive research demonstrates that standardized testing has not escaped its shameful beginning of “intelligence tests” for military fitness, which were designed to confirm beliefs of eugenics and racism (Meier and Gasoi 2017); and

WHEREAS, colleges and universities continue to move away from awarding placement or credit for passing single standardized tests such as Advanced Placement (AP), even as the state continues its close alliance with College Board in course creation and professional development³; and

WHEREAS, colleges and universities are moving away from using ACT or SAT scores as admission criteria because they are not a predictor of college success, are cost prohibitive for low-income students, and are culturally biased, thus limiting the opportunities for students of color to pursue higher education⁴; and

WHEREAS, our nation’s policymakers must recognize that the current standardized, large-scale testing data reveals systems and problems in our public education systems, but that those data alone are insufficient to address each student’s learning needs or to guide teachers’ day-to-day instruction, and alone do not provide the courage and resources to make systemic changes to address the areas for improvement that standardized tests may reveal; and

¹ Shepard et al. Classroom Assessment Principles to Support Teaching and Learning (Feb. 2020). Retrieved 31 Aug. 2021 from https://www.colorado.edu/cadre/sites/default/files/attached-files/classroom_assessment_principles_to_support_teaching_and_learning_-_final_0.pdf

² Fleischer et al. NCTE Position Statement: Formative Assessment that *Truly* Informs Instruction, p. 2 (Oct. 2013). Retrieved 31 Aug. 2021 from https://cdn.ncte.org/nctefiles/resources/positions/formative-assessment_booklet.pdf

³ Weinstein. Diminishing Credit: How Colleges and Universities Restrict the Use of Advanced Placement (Sept. 2016). Retrieved 21 Sept. 2021 from <https://www.progressivepolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/09/MEMO-Weinstein-AP.pdf>

⁴ National Center for Fair and Open Testing (2021). Retrieved 31 Aug. 2021 from <https://fairtest.org/university/optional>

90
91 **WHEREAS**, our union does not oppose standardized testing when the data it generates is used
92 appropriately to improve student learning, school programs, and other school and district
93 continuous improvement activities; and
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95 **WHEREAS**, our union opposes the ways state and federal policy-makers have misused
96 standardized test data to shame, blame and close schools attended by some of Illinois' most
97 vulnerable students and to fire teachers in ways that disparately impact teachers of color,
98 especially Black teachers⁵; and
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100 **WHEREAS**, the Illinois State Board of Education is proposing a new state testing program that
101 increases state mandated, high-stakes standardized testing for grades 3-8 students from
102 one end-of-year administration to multiple test administrations across the school year and
103 expands interim standardized testing to grades K-2 at an additional cost of over \$227 million
104 over the next ten years, which will only exacerbate and further embed testing throughout the
105 school year; therefore be it

106 **RESOLVED**, the Illinois Federation of Teachers (IFT) and its affiliate unions work with
107 community partners to advocate for a dramatic, research-based systemic change to
108 local, state, and national policies and practices, which centers culturally responsive
109 teaching and assessment practices at the heart of balanced and humane assessment
110 systems; and be it further
111

112 **RESOLVED**, the IFT and its affiliate unions work to change the prevailing narrative that
113 says standardized test data are the only, or most effective, way to identify learning
114 gaps in order to address inequities by elevating people's stories about the negative
115 impacts of high stakes standardized testing on students' and educators' academic,
116 physical, and mental health and highlighting how balanced, culturally responsive
117 assessment systems can be used to provide deeper, more meaningful learning
118 experiences to all students, and especially Black and Brown students; and be it
119 further
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121 **RESOLVED**, the IFT promote state legislation requiring local education agencies to seek
122 community input before increasing spending on standardized testing and putting
123 limits on the state's ability to require additional testing beyond federal minimums;
124 and be it further
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126 **RESOLVED**, the IFT make available to affiliate unions and members union-developed,
127 sustained, job-embedded professional learning on culturally responsive assessment
128 practices that support high quality instructional practices, providing classroom-
129 based, day-to-day learning feedback to students and educators; and be it further
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131 **RESOLVED**, the IFT professional learning will develop knowledge for training to support
132 educators and Performance Evaluation Reform Act joint committee members to
133 improve educators' choices in using authentic, curriculum-embedded assessment
134 that allows for demonstration of success and to be better able to critique the
135 limitations of selecting large-scale, vendor created standardized tests as part of
136 teacher performance evaluation; and be it further
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⁵ Shanker Institute. The State of Teacher Diversity in American Education (Sept. 2015) Retrieved 21
Sept. 2021 from <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/ED563794.pdf>

138 **RESOLVED, the IFT advocates for reprioritizing budgeting of state funds away from**
139 **standardized testing to statewide professional learning and cross-training that**
140 **supports a paradigm shift, which views students as humans and not data points, from**
141 **overreliance on large-scale standardized tests and test-prep to creating local**
142 **balanced assessment systems that support instructional approaches grounded in**
143 **formative and summative culturally responsive, curriculum-embedded assessments;**
144 **and be it further**

145
146 **RESOLVED, the IFT provide guidance and resources to affiliates and members outlining**
147 **how America's dominant culture of white supremacy has created historic, systemic**
148 **inequalities in public education which most directly impact Black and Brown**
149 **students, families, and educators, in order to assist affiliate locals in using**
150 **assessment data, contextual data, and other evidence to identify needs for structural**
151 **changes as part of local labor-management partnerships; and be it further**

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153 **RESOLVED, the IFT advocate that Illinois colleges and universities become permanently**
154 **test-optional as part of admission criteria; and be it further**

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156 **RESOLVED, the IFT advocate for investment in programs that promote collaborative**
157 **efforts between secondary teachers and college and university partners to develop**
158 **capstone/senior level classes in the humanities that take an explicit culturally**
159 **sustaining approach (Paris & Alim, 2017), along with other mechanisms for college**
160 **preparedness, and disconnect the Illinois State Board of Education from promoting**
161 **and funding College Board (e.g. Advanced Placement) programming as the preferred**
162 **state approach to giving students a head start on college; and be it further**

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164 **RESOLVED, the IFT and its affiliate unions engage with and support the American**
165 **Federation of Teachers (AFT) in advancing our union's national agenda to reauthorize**
166 **the Every Student Succeeds Act so that the current federal testing mandate no longer**
167 **stands in the way of schools, districts and states creating humane, balanced**
168 **assessment systems which value teacher-determined, curriculum-embedded,**
169 **culturally responsive, ongoing formative and summative assessment practices to**
170 **provide ongoing learning feedback to students and educators while making**
171 **appropriate uses of large-scale standardized test data to make larger programmatic**
172 **and policy decisions; and be it finally**

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174 **RESOLVED, the IFT share a copy of this resolution with the AFT, the Illinois General**
175 **Assembly leaders, the Governor, the State Superintendent, and the chair of the**
176 **Illinois State Board of Education.**