



An Open Letter to the Ripley County Community:

As superintendents of the four school corporations in Ripley County, we would like to express our concerns about the Spring 2015 ISTEP tests, as those scores are set to be released to the public very soon. In reviewing the data provided to schools, it is clear that the passing percentages are not an accurate reflection of our students' academic accomplishments nor the quality of teaching in our classrooms.

As you will recall, our Ripley County schools produced some of the highest passing rates in the state on the 2014 ISTEP, resulting in all four corporations being designated as A rated, with at least one Four Star School in each district.

The Indiana Department of Education has told us to expect steep declines across the state when scores for the 2015 ISTEP are released. Statewide, English/Language Arts passing percentages are down by an average of 16% and Math passing percentages are down by an average of 24%. This is interesting given that, in the same year, Indiana students posted historically high marks on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), the test commonly known as the nation's report card.

This dramatic decrease in ISTEP passing rates can be attributed to several factors, including an abrupt change in state standards, a much more difficult test that was developed without the benefit of the normal piloting process, the use of different forms of the test by schools, and the setting of arbitrary pass/fail cut scores.

Current state standards for English/Language Arts and Math were changed by the State Board of Education in April 2014 and were communicated to schools in late summer as the 2014-2015 school year was beginning. This left teachers very little time to make necessary adjustments to curriculum and teaching strategies.

Because the new standards were designed to require students to have a greater depth of knowledge, this meant the ISTEP had to be completely redesigned to assess this deeper learning. This also meant that the testing company did not have adequate time to develop test preparation materials for schools to help students prepare for the new types of questions.

Additionally, just prior to testing, a big controversy surrounding the length of the new test developed at the State Board level in Indianapolis. This resulted in the decision to not have all

schools take all parts of the new test. Schools were assigned to either take Form 1 or Form 2 of the test, instead of taking both forms. Another complicating factor was that many schools chose to take paper/pencil versions of the test instead of using the online (computer based) testing platform.

It has already been discussed at the state level that the online and paper/pencil versions were not equivalent tests in regard to difficulty. Similarly, for those of us who saw both Form 1 and Form 2 of the test, it was obvious that there were significant differences in the difficulty of questions between those forms.

In addition to the issues with the test and the change in standards, the State Board of Education approved setting 2015 ISTEP cut scores at a point where 40% of students statewide would fail. These higher cut scores disregarded the recommendation of the State Superintendent of Public Instruction and the best practices of other states that have adopted more rigorous academic standards and assessments.

In our districts, we know that one high stakes test does not paint a complete picture of a child's ability. That is why each of our districts use several methods to determine the academic achievement and growth of our students. The results of this year's flawed test have the potential to impact not only students' academic records, but also educator ratings and school letter grades. This is why we believe our students, schools, and educators should be held harmless of any negative impact of the 2015 ISTEP scores.

We are committed to providing a top quality education for all students in Ripley County and our past successes show the kind of results for which our students are known, and of which our communities are proud. Unfortunately, the 2015 ISTEP test scores may paint a different picture and may not accurately represent the remarkable gains our schools have made over the last decade. We will not let the results of the flawed 2015 ISTEP change our belief in our students, staff, parents and communities. We continue to have excellent schools in Ripley County and we thank you for your continued support.

Yours in Education,

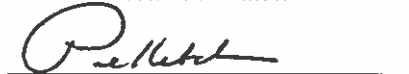
Mr. Rob Moorhead - South Ripley



Dr. Jim Roberts - Batesville



Mr. Paul Ketcham - Milan



Mr. Tim Taylor - Jac-Cen-Del

