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2009 CRCT Audit Analysis Summary

April 28, 2010

For approximately two and a half months, the Dougherty County School System has conducted a comprehensive investigation of the 2009 CRCT Audit Analysis released by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement. We immediately sought assistance from the Office of Student Achievement, the Professional Standards Commission, and the Georgia Department of Education. We requested that the state's highest ethical body for educators, the Professional Standards Commission, provide consultant services. Dr. Gerald Eads, Coordinator of Evaluation and Research and former Assistant Superintendent for Testing and Evaluation at the Virginia Department of Education, was named to our team by the Executive Director of the PSC. We also requested that the consultant hired by the Dougherty County Board of Education, Mr. James Wilson, spearhead the investigation and ultimately, report to the Board of Education upon completion of the investigation.

Since the audit stated that eight of our elementary schools were designated in the Severe category as well as five elementary schools and one middle school were in the Moderate category, our goal was to assure parents, the community, and teachers that we do not condone cheating. We also wanted to further demonstrate that our highest goal is student learning. One indicator of student learning is the accurate measure of academic performance on the state's CRCT minimum competency tests.

The CRCT audit report states that the erasure analysis, in isolation, does not indicate that cheating occurred. The executive summary also states that additional layers of information would be needed to determine with certainty that cheating occurred. Therefore, we have diligently sought to gather the requisite, ancillary information.

Although the investigation was noted as essential, it has taken extensive efforts by the Dougherty County School System to secure any, much less sufficient, information for a proper investigation, including an official open records request. The timeline for our actions was as follows:

- The only data provided by the Office of Student Achievement on February 8th included the total classroom data for the flagged classes/test sections comparing the flagged classroom/test section to the state data.
- The audit analysis was reported to the State Board of Education on February 10th:
- The first data release (names of students with excessive WTR answers) was received by DCSS on March 12th.
- Repeated requests to review answer documents for Grades 1 and 2 were denied.
- The DCSS had to send a team to Indianapolis, Indiana, at the system's expense, to review the answer documents for Grades 3-8 on March 22nd.
- The final data release (total erasures) was received on March 30th.

- Other data that would have been helpful but were not provided by the Governor's Office of Student Achievement included Wrong-to-Wrong erasures and Right-to-Wrong erasures.

As a result of the investigation, here are our findings as well as actions taken:

- 1.) The DCSS has policies and extensive procedures in place to ensure a structured administration of standardized tests.

Actions taken:

- In June 2009, Executive Director of the Professional Standards Commission, Dr. Gary Walker, made a presentation on the PSC Code of Ethics to all principals and assistant principals. Dr. Walker spent approximately 30 minutes on assessment and violations of the code of ethics in testing. This is an example of the priority the DCSS has placed on the administration and security of standardized tests.
- The DCSS Testing Coordinator conducted the training session for the system. Elementary and middle school principals *and* assistant principals, who also serve as the site testing coordinator, attended the system training session as well as the re-delivery training at each school. This training is conducted annually.
- No student was tested by his/her teacher or teachers in the same grade level.
- We have always had proctors in every elementary classroom. However, this year, there was a proctor in *every* middle school classroom as well. (Parents and volunteers had to be utilized to accommodate every middle school classroom.) Additionally, there was a proctor for every small group testing and one-on-one testing, typically for students with disabilities or make-up tests.
- Community members visited the schools to observe the administration of the test.
- Although we had invited the media to the schools to observe the testing environment, we were re-directed by the Georgia Department of Education to not provide media access.
- State monitors were assigned to the eight elementary schools in the Severe category.

- 2.) The DCSS has taken extensive measures to ensure the security of the test booklets and answer documents.

Actions taken:

- To protect the integrity of the test documents, all locks were re-keyed at each school to ensure that the testing coordinator at the school and the principal were the only professionals with access.
- At the end of the testing period daily, teachers immediately took their tests to the testing coordinator to be checked in, which is a normal procedure. This year, however, the test documents were placed in envelopes and taped with signatures.

- 3.) Our children have been taught to use a process of elimination. Consequently, they erase a lot – in some schools more than others. Although the process is a good one, many of our children actually used the process on the answer documents, which is the primary cause of the extensive erasures identified by the OSA audit.

Actions taken:

- Children were instructed to make as few marks on the answer document as possible.
- Excessive erasures were discouraged.

4.) Irregularities in the administration have always been reported immediately to the test coordinator and then reported to the Georgia Department of Education.

Actions taken:

- Any/all irregularities in the administration of the tests were documented by the teacher in every classroom.
- The proctor and teacher were watchful of children getting off track on the answer document.

As a result of the thorough examination of the data released by the Office of Student Achievement and data compiled by the DCSS, here are our findings:

- 1.) Percentages of classes identified as having erasures were actually percentages of the sections of each test flagged. If one teacher had each test section flagged, that could account for “3 classes having been flagged”. The total percentage of classes flagged at a school, therefore, was not the total percentage of teachers at the site.
 - The teachers were identified at the schools, and all evidence was examined.
- 2.) No pattern of cheating was noted by the team of investigators who reviewed the test documents in Indianapolis.
- 3.) 63% of the test sections flagged in the 13 elementary schools in the Severe and Moderate categories were Grades 1 and 2.
 - Although repeated requests were made to access Grade 1 and 2 documents, OSA denied these requests. Therefore, without the ability to review the actual test documents, it was impossible to draw conclusions based on the WTR data alone.
 - Grades 1 and 2 tests are read to the children by the teachers administering the tests.
 - Naturally, 6 and 7-year-olds are just learning to take standardized tests and consequently, mark everywhere on the answer documents.
 - The **CRCT** at the first and second grade level does not count towards AYP.
 - The legislature has removed the funding for the first and second grade tests from the budget.
- 4.) For 12 of the 13 schools, removing Grades 1-2 flagged test sections reduces the percentages significantly.

	<u>* Grades 3-5 test sections flagged</u>	<u>No. of Teachers</u>
West Town (77.2%)	47%	10
Jackson Heights (57.9%)	23%	9
Northside (52.2%)	22%	6
MLK, Jr. (45.6%)	33%	8
Turner (39.4%)	15%	5
Alice Coachman (31.7%)	8%	3
Morningside (31.6%)	7%	2
Sherwood (25%)	4%	3
Lamar Reese (22.7%)	3%	2

Sylvester Road (22.2%)	5%	2
Radium Elementary (21.4%)	1%	1
Magnolia (18.2%)	5%	1
Lincoln (14.3%)	6%	3

- 5.) In Grades 3-8, there were at least 15 forms in each section of the test. Therefore, only a few students per test section had the exact same test form.
- 6.) Since Grades 3-5 are typically departmentalized and Grades 6-8 are departmentalized, it is highly unlikely that a teacher who teaches one content would jeopardize his/her career to alter his/her homeroom's test scores to inflate a colleague's scores.
- 7.) In classes where students had high numbers of WTR erasures, most students had much higher numbers of **total erasures**.
- 8.) In the majority of the homerooms that had high numbers of WTR erasures, the same children typically had high numbers of WTR erasures and higher total erasures on each test section.
- 9.) In the 8 elementary schools in the Severe category, 32% of the test sections flagged had at least 3 students fail the test section. 17% of the 32% of the test sections flagged had at least 5 students fail the test section.
- 10.) For the 13 elementary schools in the Severe and Moderate Category:
 In 39% of the elementary grade levels flagged, the 2009 **CRCT** scores were **lower** than the 2008 **CRCT** scores.
 52 individual teacher's test section scores decreased in 2009 as compared to 2008.
 24 individual teacher's test sections increased by 5 points or less in 2009.
- 11.) With proctors in every elementary classroom in 2009, it would have been virtually impossible to tamper with the answer documents in the DCSS. Not a single individual reported cheating.

Although there were a few classrooms with data that could not be explained, every possible avenue was thoroughly investigated to determine whether or not cheating occurred. From reviewing large amounts of data, examining test documents in grades 3-8 in Indianapolis by the team from the DCSS, and interviewing professionals by the consultant and system administrators, a level of comfort was reached to ensure the school system, parents, and the community that widespread unethical behavior had not occurred.

I would never claim that individuals in my profession, in my school system, *or in any profession*, for that matter, would always choose to uphold a level of professionalism that is beyond reproach. However, I am more convinced than ever before that the vast majority of educators are committed to providing a quality education for children and to meeting the needs of children, which have become increasingly more challenging over the years. I am also convinced that the vast majority of educators are committed to upholding the integrity of standardized tests.