

# GATEWAY REGIONAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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## *Superintendent's Corner*

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It is extraordinary to contemplate the changes in education over the last few decades with the advent of mandated standardized testing across the country. These changes were driven home this past week as I watched the new, full-day preschool students at the main complex on their new playground equipment in the Gateway courtyard. The sheer joy and exuberance in their actions, the level of energy and even the courtesy displayed while taking turns makes one wonder if we've really improved education over the years.

I'm sure many of us remember the stress of high stakes testing while we were in school, except years ago it was just a few times over our educational career (taking the SAT's for college or even taking the ASVAB as part of the military induction process). Today we have tests that begin to impact our students, such as MCAS, as early as third grade and they occur over and over throughout public school, taking hours upon hours of time from the learning environment and only measuring a minute amount of what people actually need to know and be able to do to succeed in society.

These repetitive tests and the amount of time, energy and costs for both local schools and the state have to make one wonder about the overall benefits of this regimen. When coupled with the statistical manipulation of the data to make scores somehow meaningful, rather than setting a consistent level to measure competence, and linking this to the extraordinary measures taken to ensure that the questions are relevant to the students (i.e., asking students math questions about golf or using a writing prompt about beach vacations when many families have no experience regarding either), it makes one wonder if the arguments about the validity of scores have merit.

So rather than really looking broadly at changing an educational system that is still based upon the industrial revolution and aimed at creating a mass of trained workers for factories, we tinker around the edges, talk as though standardized test scores somehow relate to success in life, and evaluate student success using techniques that no modern day business would use in managing employee success. Have we really fallen hook, line and sinker into believing that doing the same thing over and over again will somehow yield a different outcome? Do we look at the disconnect between the skills needed in a changing work environment and the traditional curriculum that hasn't significantly changed since Horace Mann's early work? Do we consider the changes in communication technology when we still insist upon outdated textbooks? Do we still think of teachers as the 'sage on the stage' when we know knowledge is doubling almost every year and, according to IBM, will eventually double every 12 hours once the 'internet of things' fully evolves?

It would seem the answer to these questions on a state or national level is an emphatic "NO!" Ask yourself if we're teaching the competencies that today's ten year old will need to know at age twenty-one. Ask yourself what your most powerful learning experience was in high school and whether or not it occurred in a core academic classroom? Ask yourself how you know you've mastered a particular subject or activity and whether this came from passing a multiple choice test? Most people find that their answers don't point to our current

educational system as being the best in preparing one for life. You only have to look at the difference in student outlook, energy, responsiveness and engagement between pre-school and high school to see that, for many students, our current system isn't working. There are certainly many individuals and groups working to change our current thinking on education (look at some of Ted Robinson's TED talks, visit <https://www.nextgenlearning.org/>, or do a Google search on student-centered learning) and some schools that are flipping learning on its head.

The questions then become 'what's next', 'how do we change', and 'how do I impact education at the local, state and national level'? Remember the words of Margaret Mead as we contemplate our answers, "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has."

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