



SBA Testing: The Value of Local Assessments

The following speech was given at the October 4, 2017 Board of Education meeting by BFT President Cathy Campbell.

Good Evening Board Members and Superintendent Evans,

My name is Cathy Campbell and I am the President of the Berkeley Federation of Teachers. Thank you very much for taking the time to discuss this important policy question.

We know that this Board is on record as supporting multiple measures to assess the success of our efforts to serve students and families. That stance has prevented some of the worst outcomes of high stakes standardized testing in BUSD. We are here tonight to urge the continuation of a balanced and sophisticated approach even in the face of the new State accountability system.

We believe that the Dashboard and the LCAP process will raise pressure on elected policymakers to put tremendous weight on SBA test scores. We urge the Board to resist those pulls for all of the reasons you have heard and will hear tonight.

Critical to this endeavor is the investment of significant time and resources into local districtwide assessments. Local assessments have the huge advantage of providing data that can actually be used to inform instruction with one's current students. These timely assessments are an integral part of our Response to Intervention system, creating the universal screeners and progress monitoring tools that are needed in order to have a fully functioning RtI system that serves our targeted groups of students. In addition, local assessments give us the best possible data to monitor our achievement gaps and to gauge the impact of investments and interventions.

Where we do not have district local assessments aligned to our curricula and our RtI systems we should invest in creating those measures. This work would also present a fabulous opportunity to further engage in performance-based assessments, which best prepare our students for real life.

We do not need SBA data in order to identify or monitor our progress on equity gaps. We can achieve these ends with district assessments, and get the myriad benefits of local assessments, while minimizing the risks inherent in high-stakes standardized testing.

Thank you for your attention this evening.

The following speech was given at the October 4, 2017 Board of Education meeting by BFT Organizer Julie Searle.

Hello everyone. My name is Julie Searle. I have taught middle school humanities in Berkeley for the last 14 years. I'm here to speak on behalf of the arts, and of locally created assessments in our schools.

Three of the things we know of that work for teaching and learning breakthroughs are:
relationships, differentiation, and building from strength.

Standardized testing replicates the current inequitable status quo and does not provide information that helps us to transform outcomes for students. The arts, on the other hand, can serve as a holistic intervention, creating new pathways for student-teacher connection and growth. As policymakers, in looking at the weight given to SBA test scores it is very important to be mindful of the unintended negative consequences that occur if great weight or high stakes are assigned. One of the greatest risks is pushing out the arts and creativity in the school life of students.

We need to provide rich opportunities to amplify each student's unique capabilities as a learner. When we focus intently on standardized data, we narrow the curriculum, in fact we dumb it down. Giving time and resources for the arts has been shown not only to increase literacy and math understanding, but to enhance creativity, problem solving, and collaboration, and, bottom line, it enriches lives.

What I want as an educator is every opportunity to understand what my students can grasp and do, and what is in their way. Identifying student strengths on which to build requires the kind of nuanced information we can only get from ongoing, local, descriptive feedback.

If I expect students to fully show up in my class, I also want the time and room to embed the arts in my lessons, knowing that this can be one of the powerful ways to engage a child's self-worth and perseverance.

I was born here, my dad got his teacher credential from UC Berkeley, and all three of my daughters graduated from Berkeley High. I believe that our district can and should show a unique leadership that is badly needed in the world of public education.

Berkeley, of all places, should have the courage to do education right, to not bow down to the standardized testing mania that has been proven a failure and which contributes to the reproduction of segregation, the achievement gap, and crushed lives. If our district takes a stand, others will follow.

When we assess for learning within the live classroom, we involve students in their own process of growth. And when we make room for teaching that is rich and expansive, we are able to reach students and help them find out what they can do and who they can be.

The late great Congresswoman Barbara Jordan said, The arts are a response to our individuality and our nature, and help to shape our identity. What is there that can transcend deep difference and stubborn divisions? The arts. They have a wonderful universality. Art has the potential to unify. It can speak in many languages without a translator. The arts do not discriminate. The arts can lift us up.

In over 1,000 parent conferences, families have told me they want to know how to motivate their kids to care about school. Creativity provides a touch point for family support, and is a powerful tool for developing an ongoing commitment to learning.

As Berkeley High graduate Ursula Le Guin said,
It is above all by the imagination that we achieve perception, compassion and hope.

Let us have the courage to choose the most powerful assessments and the richest teaching practices we can.

Thank you

The following speech was given at the October 4, 2017 Board of Education meeting by BFT Vice President Matt Meyer.

Good evening School Board members and Superintendent Evans,

I am Matt Meyer and I teach Economics at Berkeley High. I also am the Vice President of the Berkeley Federation of Teachers. I am here to speak about the use of SBA scores.

One claim that has been made is that these scores will allow us to compare ourselves to other districts. Although comparisons can be made, I question what that data actually tells us and how much we can really learn from it.

When working on the 9th grade redesign last year, we were focused on how to improve our students experience in school, how to build stronger relationships with our students, and how we can improve our teaching practices to improve education outcomes. We looked at research and best practices and found schools that were doing this well. We were able to compare our students' experiences to those at other schools without looking at SBA data. We did not think this data accurately reflected student achievement in other districts or our own. We already have measures like Constructing Meaning and Math 1 common assessments to let us know with our current students how they are learning. I doubt the SBA's ability to show us what is actually happening in our schools, especially when these tests are so disconnected from the work that we do on a daily basis.

At my previous school in order to look good comparatively, we gave up all instruction in English, History and Math to work on test prep one time a week. All this test prep did allow us to see how well our test prep compared to other schools' test prep but we still couldn't say much about the skills that mattered to us. It's important to keep in OUR minds the impacts that standardized testing CAN have on teaching and learning even if that is not our intention.

The SBA claims to test 21st century skills. As a teacher, I know that performance based and curriculum embedded assessments that allow for group work, essay writing, simulations, research tasks, and critical thinking are a much better way to assess our current students and the skills they have. Any attention we give to the SBA tests will be attention we are not giving to more authentic assessments. We may see our SBA percentages go up and go down in any given year, and so will others schools' scores, but we will miss the real teaching and learning that is taking place.

The following speech was given at the October 4, 2017 Board of Education meeting by BFT Secretary Angela Reed.

Good Evening Board Members and Superintendent Evans,
My name is Angela Reed and I am a 3rd grade teacher at Jefferson Elementary. I have been a 3rd grade teacher for 7 Years. I am also the BFT Executive-Secretary.

I'm here tonight to speak about my experience with the unintended negative consequences that have occurred because of the increased weight being given to SBA scores. When the district and sites use these scores to make policy and resource decisions the risk is that the expertise, professionalism and creativity of a classroom can be stripped from teaching and from the joy of learning. Teaching can become more about teaching to the test than providing a well-rounded fruitful educational experience for every child. In my experience, the pressure on the test scores is worsening BUSD.

In past years, the scope and sequence of my year included month long units that integrated math, reading and writing with science, history, art and/or music. Then, I had the autonomy to design lessons that struck a balance between the academics and creativity. I was able to bring in my passions, such as singing and cooking. Teaching was exciting and meaningful.

Now, I have been given a strict scope and sequence that I must adhere to for fear of not covering a concept that will be on the SBA. There is little/to no time for anything else. I no longer see projects and art line our halls. Our assemblies are no longer filled with performances that the teacher and class worked hard on. Much of the joy of learning is lost. Unfortunately, this is not just the state of my classroom or school. It is representative of all 3rd-5th grade classrooms and elementary schools across BUSD.

So I caution you when making policy and/or resource decisions based on SBA results. I am constantly telling my students, "Make wise decisions". And I am asking this of you tonight. Thank you.

The following speech was given at the October 4, 2017 Board of Education meeting by BFT Site Rep Keldon Clegg.

Good evening,

My name is Keldon Clegg and I have been a social studies teacher for eleven years, seven of which have been at Berkeley High. In addition I have been a TSA for Instructional Technology for the past three years and can speak first hand about the impact, effectiveness and utility of the SBA both at the high school and across the school district.

The SBA impacts our district by interrupting innovative and meaningful assessments created by BUSD teachers as well as placing a strain on limited district resources.

SBA falls during the time of the year when locally created, authentic and summative assessments are already happening across our sites, often with meaningful tech integration in taking place. Last spring at Berkeley High students were working on podcasts, digital portfolios, blogs, screencasts and other exciting projects. Then, due the SBA's timing and use of resources, these assessments needed to be halted, reconfigured or in some cases abandoned.

Nearly every chrome cart on campus was mobilized for SBA testing, as was anyone and everyone who plays a role in technology in the district, which left teachers forced to shoehorn tech lessons in at awkward times in their unit planning, and left actual technology issues sidelined for weeks while testing took place. Teachers lost professional development time to learn how to administer the test during a time of the year when student support is critical.

If the SBA was an effective measurement of a student's technology skills it would be an incredible asset, but it fails to do this. Using chrome books to click on a multiple-choice answer is NOT tech integration. Even suggesting such is like saying taking a scantron with a paintbrush is an effective assessment of a student's art ability. The digital divide in BUSD is real. SBA's adaptive testing program does not provide data to help us measure or solve this issue; indeed, by interrupting the hard work of teachers it is an obstacle to closing the achievement gap.

Thank you for your time.

The following speech was given at the October 4, 2017 Board of Education meeting by BFT Site Rep Julia Hart.

My name is Julia Hart and I am a resource specialist at Cragmont. I have been a special education teacher for 9 years and this is my second year in Berkeley.

I believe that testing discourages the use of project-based learning and can destroy the joy of learning. I also believe the scores are not useful, because by the time we receive the scores, many of our students have moved classes or schools and we have no information about what types of questions they should review beyond general categories.

Local assessments provide us with data that can inform instruction and improve learning. Additionally, I feel that the tests are developmentally inappropriate at the elementary level. The length of testing time is too long and creates unnecessary

stress in children. We should minimize the effects of testing to create more time for project based learning, increase the joy of learning, allow more time for assessments that actually inform instruction, and reduce the stress that our students experience as a result of high stakes testing.

The following speech was given at the October 4, 2017 Board of Education meeting by BFT Site Rep Chloe Smith.

Good evening. Thank you for the opportunity to speak tonight about an issue that concerns me deeply. My name is Chloe Smith and I teach English Language Arts to 7th Graders at Willard Middle School. I have administered the SBA since it was first tested in California Schools, and I believe that it is an ineffective assessment tool for our students. Our district should not rely on it as a basis for resource or policy decisions.

Data from the SBA is flawed. It's also out of date by the time teachers get it. Local assessments are better tools for teachers to understand their students' needs, since those assessments provide current data on a regular basis. We need to continue this work and create more strong local assessments, which teachers can integrate into their curriculum planning.

If we fail to do that, and raise the stakes on our use of the SBA, not only will we limit our ability to use assessment to inform instruction, but we will pay the price of many costly side effects.

High-stakes testing changes how teachers use classroom time. Teachers narrow the focus of instruction, deemphasizing citizenship, social studies, science, career and technical education, music, and the arts. Teachers also become afraid to stand by their professional judgement, and are less likely to allocate class time based on student needs, or adapt to "teachable moments" as they happen. Students lose out on differentiated instruction, breadth of knowledge, and diversity of learning opportunities.

We don't have one-dimensional students in Berkeley. We cannot effectively serve them by making decisions based on out-of-date, one-dimensional data points.

The following speech was given at the October 4, 2017 Board of Education meeting by BFT Organizer Sean Keller.

Good evening School Board Members, Teachers, Parents and Community Members,

My name is Sean Keller. I am 4th grade teacher at Jefferson Elementary School. I have had the privilege of being a Berkeley Teacher for the past 19 years. During that time I've administered my fair share of assessments. Assessments continue to be a vital and necessary tool I use to inform and guide my instruction.

As a teacher, the assessments I turn to are well-designed **formative and summative assessments**. These assessments provide me with real time data that I can use to

improve and refine my instruction. From my experience, the SBA does NOT provide us with this type of timely & relevant feedback.

The systematic and regular use of **local assessments** is happening right now all over our district. We are using exit tickets, journal entries, short writing assignments, mid-unit writing assessments, mid and end of module math assessments, and TCRWP reading assessments. These **localized assessments** are strategically designed & delivered to identify a student's progress. They provide us with a look into a student's understanding of a topic or concept.

At Jefferson Elementary, and across our district, we have become much smarter and more deliberate about how we identify and track student's progress throughout the school year.

Let's look specifically at **reading**. Through the PLC model, with the tremendous support of our RTI Teachers, Special Ed Teachers, Administrators, and grade level colleagues, we have created a model that allows us to monitor and respond to a student's learning. We understand that struggling students need targeted, strategic interventions and supports. We monitor our student's progress by using our TCRWP reading assessments. The use of these **Local Assessments** on a daily and weekly basis provide us clear insight into whether our students are making reading progress or whether or not we need to reevaluate and refine our interventions.

I am convinced that it will be through the effective and clinical administration of **local assessments** that we will make the greatest gains in closing the achievement gap.

The following speech was given at the October 4, 2017 Board of Education meeting by BFT Site Rep Zabed Monika.

As a science teacher at Willard Middle School, I am deeply concerned by what I see as the district's disproportionate emphasis on improving SBA test scores. I believe this narrow focus is actively harmful to our students social, emotional, and academic well-being. If the past is any guide, diverting scarce resources to improve test scores will indeed improve test scores, but at the direct expense of meaningful academic and social development.

I believe that US students' continued mediocre academic and social performance on the international stage is a result of the narrow emphasis on test scores that has ruled our schools since No Child Left Behind. Research supports that ELA and math proficiency is improved by teaching other subjects in a diverse, integrated curriculum yet, in my experience, BUSD allocates most co-teaching and additional resources to ELA or Math.

The academic success of students in Singapore and Finland, generally ranked one and two in international tests is based in large part on the broad-based curricula their students are exposed to. Simply put, a music class is more likely to help students improve their math skills than a second math class.

Help our students thrive by resisting the urge to focus on SBA results, a metric with no statistically proven worth. If we truly value our children's future, we must resist the short-term gratification of improved SBA scores in favor of providing the rich, student-focused, research-supported education they deserve and our society desperately needs. Thank you for your consideration.