

Press Release Scheduled for Release Jan. 14, 2014

From: Senator Steven Thayn
Concerning: SBAC test

I would like to announce this morning that I have notified Tom Luna's office, the State Board of Education, Governor Otter, the chairmen of the House and Senate Education committees and the committee members that I can no longer support the SBAC test; and, call for the creation of an alternative to be used in the 2014-2015 school year. Several reasons justify this position.

The SBAC stands for Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium, an organization of over 20 states that have used federal and private funds to create a multi-state test.

1. SBAC is a form of extreme testing requiring up to 8 hours (7 hours for 3rd graders). The Idaho Department of Education says Idaho needs to have a nationwide test to be able to compare Idaho students with students across the nation. This comparison can be done by testing a random sample of 1,000 students in grades 4 and 8 at much less cost and time requirements.
2. The SBAC test does not provide immediate feedback needed to help the classroom teacher formulate instruction. The main purpose of the SBAC test is to give data to statisticians. The main purpose of tests should be to help teachers and parents. SBAC seems to be a tool for policy makers to monitor, control, and manipulate teachers, students, and parents. Test should have immediate feedback. SBAC does not.
3. The Idaho State Department of Education is not able to guarantee that pornographic passages or agenda-driven questions will not be on the SBAC.
4. SBAC has no process to lodge a complaint or modify the test. When this issue has been brought up to the Idaho Department of Education, the Department indicates that we can get out at any time. I suggest that this is the time. The American people have long enjoyed due process and checks and balances in their public institutions. SBAC has no due process procedures in place.
5. SBAC creates a multi-state testing system. SBAC shifts decisions from state level to a multi-state level and will further alienate parents and make it harder for legislators, teachers, and parents to impact public policy threatening state control over a wide range of education issues.
6. The test process has two unacceptable and dangerous characteristics.
 - a. SBAC using a technique called 'close reading.' Close Reading means that a passage is given as a prompt for writing. The student can only use the information in the prompt in the writing. No outside information can be used. This could be potentially harmful and discriminatory to young and vulnerable students, especially, those students who do not agree with the assumptions of the prompt. The prompt may be asking a student to defend a belief that they morally or politically do not agree with. This could be used to identify student with certain acceptable or non-acceptable belief systems.
 - b. Anecdotal stories indicate that in doing a math problem, a student may get more credit for working the problem using an approved process but getting the wrong answer while a student that uses a non-approved process to get the correct answer could receive a lower grade than a student that got the wrong answer but used the approved process. This would discriminate against any student who was not taught in an "approved system" such as home schooled children or children taught in private schools.
7. Cost of the test has not been determined. Because there is some hand grading, the cost could be much more that the current system of testing. Costs have not yet been discussed.
8. Finally, data is a big concern. I have before me a draft of a bill that says data "shall not be transferred to any federal, state, or local agency or other organization/entity outside of the state of Idaho, with the following exceptions." Then exception iii says: "A student registers, for

or takes a national or multistate assessment.” Translation is if a student takes the SBAC test, the state of Idaho can transmit individual student data to the federal government! I do not think the state of Idaho should store individual student data. The state should only receive aggregate data from school districts. The data should be kept at the district level and the state perform audit to assure accurate record keeping.

Alternatives should be developed to replace the SBAC for the 2014-2015 school year that could include:

- Limit a longer test to only the 4th and 8th grades
- Use the SAT in high school. This would give an indication of how Idaho students compare with other students nationwide.
- Consider what other states are using that have already withdrawn from SBAC
- Bring back the ISAT but design it for the new standards and use it only in specific grades.

My biggest regret during my 8 years in the legislature is not getting public “buy in” before the Students Come First bills were implemented. Not because the most of the content was poor, lacking, or misguided; in fact, the Students Come First bills are still guiding the discussion and impacting policy. The regret is because of the process. The bills were imposed on the people and the state without their permission. I see the supporters of Common Core and SBAC making the same mistake. This time I will listen. Legislators need to listen to citizen concerns and take actions to address these concerns. We can, then, move together with greater unity.

(The SBAC test is different than the Common Core state standards. This press release is only about the SBAC and makes no comment on the Standards themselves.)

Senator Steven Thayn is a state senator from District 8 in Idaho in his first term as a state senator.