

Civil Rights Groups: “We Oppose Anti-Testing Efforts”

Participation in Assessments Critical for Expanding Educational Opportunity for All Students

For Immediate Release

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May 5, 2015

WASHINGTON – Today, 12 national civil and human rights groups announced their opposition to anti-testing efforts springing up across the country that are discouraging students from taking standardized tests and subverting the validity of data about educational outcomes. Data obtained through some standardized tests are particularly important to the civil rights community because they are the only available, consistent, and objective source of data about disparities in educational outcomes, even while vigilance is always required to ensure tests are not misused. These data are used to advocate for greater resource equity in schools and more fair treatment for students of color, low-income students, students with disabilities, and English learners. Anti-testing efforts have resulted in statewide bills and local pressure on schools to discourage students from taking assessments, which would undermine the validity of this data. The groups’ joint statement follows:

“For the civil rights community, data provide the power to advocate for greater equality under the law. It’s the reason we’ve fought to make sure that we’re counted equally in every aspect of American life, such as in employment, the criminal justice system, and consumer lending.

Our commitment to fair, unbiased, and accurate data collection and reporting resonates greatest in our work to improve education. The educational outcomes for the children we represent are unacceptable by almost every measurement. And we rely on the consistent, accurate, and reliable data provided by annual statewide assessments to advocate for better lives and outcomes for our children. These data are critical for understanding whether and where there is equal opportunity.

Standardized tests, as ‘high stakes tests,’ have been misused over time to deny opportunity and undermine the educational purpose of schools, actions we have never supported and will never condone. But the anti-testing efforts that appear to be growing in states across the nation, like in Colorado and New York, would sabotage important data and rob us of the right to know how our students are faring. When parents ‘opt out’ of tests—even when out of protest for legitimate concerns—they’re not only making a choice for their own child, they’re inadvertently making a choice to undermine efforts to improve schools for every child.

Until federal law insisted that our children be included in these assessments, schools would try to sweep disparities under the rug by sending our children home or to another room while other students took the test. Hiding the achievement gaps meant that schools would not have to allocate time, effort, and resources to close them. Our communities had to fight for this simple right to be counted and we are standing by it.

That’s why we’re troubled by the rhetoric that some opponents of testing have appropriated from our movement. The anti-testing effort has called assessments anti-Black and compared them to the discriminatory tests used to suppress African-American voters during Jim Crow segregation. They’ve raised the specter of White supremacists who employed biased tests to ‘prove’ that people of color were inferior to Whites.

There are some legitimate concerns about testing in schools that must be addressed. But instead of stimulating worthy discussions about over-testing, cultural bias in tests, and the misuse of test data, these activists would rather claim a false mantle of civil rights activism. At the heart of that debate is whether or not we will have the courage to make the necessary investments in each and every child, no matter their race, ethnicity, class, disability status, or first language.

But we cannot fix what we cannot measure. And abolishing the tests or sabotaging the validity of their results only makes it harder to identify and fix the deep-seated problems in our schools.”

Signed,

The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights

The American Association of University Women (AAUW)

Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)

Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc. (COPAA)

Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)

League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)

NAACP

National Council of La Raza (NCLR)

National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)

National Urban League (NUL)

Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)

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