

To my friends and family,

I am an Idaho Teacher, and I am writing to you for help. For too long have many teachers sat quietly by and listened/let the Common Core and SBAC Testing debate go by with the hopes that things will be fine or change.....because truth and right always win, right? Although I do believe that truth and right will always win in the end, I know that there is often a lot of “yuck” to pass through before that happens. It is time that this teacher speaks up. I do want to make it clear that my opinions and research should not be reflected onto my school or any other school in Idaho. I work with an amazing group of people. The teachers at my school are highly trained and most importantly dedicated to their students receiving an excellent education. My administrator is truly one of the most caring and talented leaders I have ever had the privilege of working with. With that being known, I also believe there are some facts that need to be shared with the people of Idaho, so everyone can know what is happening in education right now.

For background purposes I must explain a few things. The Idaho State Department of Education has conveniently changed the name of our standards to Idaho Core Standards in order to separate themselves, in title only, from the National Common Core Standards. This was done purposely to help alleviate the outcry from concerned and upset Idaho citizens. These are one in the same no matter what title they choose to use. I also have to inform you that many Idaho teachers are not coming forth with their real and valid opinions of Common Core and the SBAC tests because they are afraid that voicing their opinion will negatively affect their school. The Idaho State Department of Education has recently set a rating system for schools based on stars. A top rated school is rated as a 5 Star School, and these schools receive the

most “bonus” money at the end of the year. As the star ratings go down, so does the money. All schools in Idaho were told that they had to have at least 95% of all their students participate in the SBAC tests this year, or their star rating would be dropped by 2 stars. Because of the fear of losing money, many teachers have been told not to say anything about Common Core or SBAC testing in fear that parents would revolt, withholding their kids from testing.

On the Idaho Department of Education’s website, there is an [“Idaho Core Standards Communications Toolkit”](#) which holds several documents to help administrators and educators deal with parents who try to “opt out” of the test on behalf of their children. One of these documents is titled, “Talking Points for Questions on Opting Out,” and a link to it can be found [HERE](#). A sample letter within this document is provided to administrators to give to parents who want to opt out. It states, *“According to a ruling from the Idaho Attorney General’s office, instruction and assessment of the Idaho Core is covered in the State of Idaho’s “rules of thoroughness”..... Therefore, the only way that a parent/guardian could opt out of the assessment would be to home school their child or place them in a private school/parochial school....”* You can read the sample letter in its entirety [HERE](#).

I write my letter now because my students just recently took the “field” SBAC (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium) tests that Idaho uses to assess the use of the Common Core Standards. My students began the SBAC test within the first hour of the school day, they tested until lunch and then had to resume the test directly after lunch. At the very end of the school day (the exact time to dismiss for busses), I still had several students who were not finished. My elementary students had spent over 5

hours testing, only having a break for lunch. This test was only 1 of 2 that my students (and all 3rd - 6th grade students at my school) were required to take. Currently, the required tests are in Math and English Language Arts.

Although the 5+ hours of testing elementary students was bad, it is not the worst of the Common Core and SBAC tests. In the morning of the first test, I was notified that teachers were not allowed to look at the computer screens and see what was on the test. I was told to position myself in the room for the entire day so that I could not see any of my students' computer screens. I was horrified that I, whom parents trust to protect, teach and take care of their children during the day, was told I couldn't even see the topics my students were reading about or the questions they were being asked.

At lunchtime my students were dismissed, and I had the opportunity to speak to another staff member who I discovered is also another "silent" educator. She asked me if I had taken the opportunity to read through some of the [sample ELA \(English Language Arts\) SBAC testing items](#) on-line. I had briefly glanced through them but did not read them thoroughly. She shared that her biggest concern was that several of the questions were based on inference (meaning how does the student feel, think or respond to the situation) and not factual information that can be found in a text. Right as she said this, my mind was brought back to some documents and resources I had read last year concerning Common Core.

The most prevalent resource in my mind was a letter written by a Doctor of Clinical Psychology by the name of Dr. Gary Thompson. He, being on the more liberal side of issues, was asked to research and give an unbiased opinion on the Common Core State Standards which were being adopted by many of the US States at the time.

His letter can be found [HERE](#). PLEASE READ HIS LETTER. Dr. Thompson states, *“According to the U.S. Department of Education, CCSS will authorize the use of testing instruments that will measure the “attributes, dispositions, social skills, attitude’s and intra personal resources” of public school students under CCSS (USDOE Feb, 2013 Report). In a nutshell, CCSS simply states that it will develop highly effective assessments that measures....well....almost “everything.” He goes on to say, “The accuracy of psychological testing has grown in the past 10 years to astonishing levels. The same tests used in our clinic for assessments, are used in part by federal law enforcement agencies, the military, local police departments, and the Central Intelligence Agency. (Interesting enough, these agencies are also interested in finding out about alleged terrorist’s, serial killers, or airline pilots “attributes, dispositions, social skills, attitudes and intra personal resources”). When placed in the “right” hands of trained mental health professionals, psychological testing can save lives. Placed in the “wrong” hands, psychological testing can ruin lives as well as cause psychological trauma to people if they have knowledge that their results were used for nefarious purposes.”* I encourage everyone to read his letter to fully understand why it is so dangerous to allow government or any entity the right to measure the “attributes, dispositions, social skills, attitudes and intra personal resources” of our children. Our students are being required by law to participate in psychological testing (psychometric testing); and I encourage everyone to log into these sample questions and see for themselves. (I can’t speak of the actual tests because I was not allowed to look at any part of these tests.) I do understand that many would look at the test questions (which are also being termed stimulus/stimuli by SBAC) and not understand how some questions could be considered psychometric, but I know firsthand that students answer questions based on their belief system, thought patterns, home atmosphere and personality. In a class of 25 students,

a teacher will get 25 different answers to a question requiring a written response, and trained professionals can read these responses and tell you a lot about the child who wrote them.

I need to digress a little and share some important information that people will need, to understand the next portion of my letter. In 2009, The “Reinvestment and Recovery Act (better known as the Stimulus Package) was put into place. In this very long and tedious document (not written by our elected officials but by special interest groups), states were allotted \$250 million in grant money if they were to implement a state “longitudinal data system” (SLDS). This information can be found in the [Reinvestment and Recovery Act](#) under the section Title XIV “State Fiscal Stabilization Fund” on pg. 169 of the internet document (on page 123 STAT. 283 of the Law).

It states, “(3) IMPROVING COLLECTION AND USE OF DATA.—The State will establish a longitudinal data system that includes the elements described in section 6401(e)(2)(D) of the America COMPETES Act (20 U.S.C. 9871).”

(4) STANDARDS AND ASSESSMENTS.—The State—
(A) will enhance the quality of the academic assessments it administers pursuant to section 1111(b)(3) of the ESEA (20 U.S.C. 6311(b)(3)) through activities such as those described in section 6112(a) of such Act (20 U.S.C. 7301a(a));
(B) will comply with the requirements of paragraphs (3)(C)(ix) and (6) of section 1111(b) of the ESEA (20 U.S.C. 6311(b)) and section 612(a)(16) of the IDEA (20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(16)) related to the inclusion of children with disabilities and limited English proficient students in State assessments, the development of valid and reliable assessments for those students, and the provision of accommodations that enable their participation in State assessments;

and

(C) will take steps to improve State academic content standards and student academic achievement standards consistent with section 6401(e)(1)(9)(A)(ii) of the America COMPETES Act.”

This [Fact Sheet](#) provided by the federal government can be a quick guide to understanding the basics of a “Statewide Longitudinal Data System” (SLDS) and their 12 required elements. A quote directly from an additional federal government website stating the purpose of these [SLDS](#):

“Purpose:

The program provides grants to states to design, develop, and implement statewide P-20 longitudinal data systems to capture, analyze, and use student data from preschool to high school, college, and the workforce.”

It is important for everyone to understand that these SLDS are created and used to track kids from Kindergarten through high school and then on through college or technical training and into the work force. This is not a typical educational data base. This is created to follow these kids even after they become adults and to know how they think, feel and what they may become.

Idaho’s choice of “State Longitudinal Data System” is ISSE (Idaho System for Educational Excellence) and powered by SchoolNet. SchoolNet is owned by Pearson.

It appears to me that ISEE was created as a **portal and official title** of Idaho’s “State Longitudinal Data System,” but it is SchoolNet that holds all of the stored data. A few years ago, the Idaho State Department of Education put on a supposed tech conference

in Boise that touted the “Flipped Learning” idea. However, it ended up being a hoorah session for SchoolNet and Pearson. Bags, cups and other trinkets were given out for free, and the message of the conference was ‘Tom Luna has created this amazing data center to help Idaho Education become better.’

[SchoolNet](#) is a company, owned by Pearson, created to help states come into compliance with having a “state longitudinal data system” therefore helping Pearson to make money, gain data and to help states get their promised federal grant money. To reiterate, Idaho has chosen ISEE/SchoolNet to collect and maintain our students’ data from Kindergarten through Highschool and College and into the Workforce (adulthood).

Back to my class’ testing experience... In our afternoon session of testing I had the feeling I should check my students’ ID #s in SchoolNet (Idaho refers to student ID#s as [EDUID](#)) and compare them to the log-in information that each student must input before taking the SBAC tests. Sure enough, each students’ ID # from SchoolNet was used to log into the test. I then thought about the continual promise to teachers and parents alike that the SBAC tests taken this spring would not be scored/shared in any way; this was just to be a test of the test. It appears to me now that this may have been a deceptive promise. I do believe that these tests are being used to provide data on each child who takes them. Why else would they need to have students input their Students ID#s that were created for use on the “State Longitudinal Data System,” (ISEE/SchoolNet) that Idaho chose to use? Someone somewhere is seeing all the data and, from the information we have learned about psychometric testing, we know that a lot can be discovered about each child in this way. I will go as far to say that I

believe our students can be and probably are being profiled according to their responses. --As a side note, parents should know that when their children are logging in to an on-line math program called, "Think Through Math" --which the State of Idaho has paid for every child in Idaho to have access to for free--, these accounts are created by their teachers who are required to set them up by using the student ID #s in our "State Longitudinal Data System," ISEE/SchoolNet. Any child who is using this program is most likely have their data gathered in this regards as well. Also, a popular on-line education tool among teachers called "Edmodo" also seems to be following suit in the data collection arena in the name of Common Core. Students are regularly asked to identify how they "feel" about a question or assignment, and a new program called "Edmodo Snapshot" involves the agreement of a "3rd Party" to have access to a child's Edmodo account and information.--

When my students' testing day ended because of the need to get my kiddos out the door and to their busses, I was on the verge of tears. These amazing students in my class looked like lifeless little spirits; they were so exhausted. I tried to tell them that they had done a great job, but I just couldn't say it without crying. I simply had to ask them to line up to prepare to go home. I honestly was sick about the fact that I had just participated in the day's events. I went home and cried. I promise parents all the time that I will keep their children safe and treat them in the highest regard. This day I failed. I felt like my hands were tied.

This is my story, and the help I am asking for is that, if possible, you share my perspective as a teacher and that you do your own research on these topics. I am a mom, wife, daughter, sister, aunt, teacher, friend and Christian. I believe there are

many more teachers in the system that feel the same way but are afraid to speak up because they love their students, and their job is crucial to their survival. Please encourage other teachers and more citizens of Idaho to speak up, or it is going to get worse and fast. Please encourage all to be diligent about their research and diligent about voting for those who will make the changes to protect our children. Don't always take the words or "talking points" of others as gospel....look things up and find out for yourself. Best of all, encourage everyone to pray for guidance to know the part that they should play in this battle for our freedoms and privacy. This argument is not about education standards; it is so much deeper than that. I feel that our very freedoms and liberties are at risk. May God bless you for your willingness to step forward and be a voice for good. Please remember that ***"The only thing necessary for the triumph of evil is that good men do nothing."***

Yours Truly,

LeAnn Castor

A Concerned Idaho Teacher