

# Moco schools chief calls for three-year moratorium on standardized testing

By Valerie Strauss , Updated: December 10, 2012

Montgomery County Superintendent Joshua Starr said Monday that the country needs a three-year moratorium on standardized testing and needs to “stop the insanity” of evaluating teachers according to student test scores because it is based on “bad science.” He also said that the best education reform the country has had is actually health-care reform.

Starr, who heads the largest school system in Maryland and the 17th largest in the country, solidified his role as a [prominent and thoughtful critic](#) of federal education policy as he challenged major initiatives launched by the administration and the reform community. Speaking on a panel at a Washington Post Live education event, Starr said that the country’s education establishment is trying to do many things at once, specifically:

- \* Implement Race to the Top reforms that states promised to put in place in exchange for federal education dollars that the Obama administration gave out through a contest. Those reforms include expanding charter schools and evaluating teachers by using students standardized test scores to determine a teacher’s “value.”
- \* Implement waivers that the Obama administration gave to those states that agreed to implement Education Department-supported reforms in exchange for an exemption from onerous No Child Left Behind mandates.
- \* Implement Common Core State Standards and create new standardized assessments that align with them.

Starr said that states and school systems can’t do all of these things at once, and concluded, “We need a three-year moratorium on all standardized tests.”

He also said it was wrong to evaluate teachers based on the scores their students get on standardized tests because the method that is based on “bad science.” He noted that he had previously worked in the New York City Department of Education, the nation’s largest school system, where he was director of school performance and accountability. It became clear, he said, that the formulas used to assess a teacher’s value with the use of test scores had huge margins of error, as much as 55 points. While he said he is sure that President Obama and Education Secretary Arne Duncan have the best of intentions, they are wrong to embrace this assessment method. In Montgomery County, standardized test scores have no percentage weight in teacher evaluations.

In fact, he said that a good way to create assessments for Common Core-aligned curriculum would be to crowd-source the development and let teachers design them rather than have corporations do it. He criticized policies that help make public education “a private commodity.”

Asked what he would do if he had the power to make one change to improve teaching, he said he would find more time for teachers to collaborate with each other. And he said that all of the emphasis on innovation in the classroom is well and good, but it doesn't address the fact that 22 percent of the country's children live in poverty and that the effects of that affect student achievement.

“Health care reform is the best education reform we've had in this country,” he said.

From Starr's lips to President Obama's ears.

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