PAUL FARROW
STATE SENATOR

January 28, 2015

Dr. Tony Evers
Department of Public Instruction
P.O. Box 7841
Madison, WI 53707-7841

Dear Dr. Evers,

We write to you today with a very specific request and call upon you and the Department of Public Instruction to act promptly to help provide clarity and consistency for all of Wisconsin's educational entities.

Recently, your department insinuated that the legislature is to blame for potentially not funding the Smarter Balanced Assessment after this year. We find it interesting that the budget appropriation was included in your budget proposal submitted in November of 2014 when we were out of session. I do not recall when the legislature was asked for input regarding your budget.

Our understanding is that the request for proposal to extend the contract with the consortium was to be considered by the end of 2014. During conversations this summer regarding the development of the accountability legislation the department made no mention of an increase in the cost of the tests. I find it ironic that the Department of Public Instruction, which consistently touts its autonomy, now wants to blame the legislature because of its inability to forecast effectively the costs of funding the state assessment.

Last year, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) consulted with the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) and requested a waiver for a one-year extension of flexibility under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). This waiver request was granted by the USDE and New York schools are free to use alternative tests during the current 2014-15 school year.

With the department's acknowledgement, due to unforeseen cost increases, the Smarter Balanced Assessment may only be utilized for one school year, it is irresponsible for the Department of Public Instruction to utilize the data from this test as the basis for any report card system or the educator effectiveness evaluations for the 2014-15 school year. We ask that you immediately request an exemption from the U.S. Department of Education for this year to utilize the data in regards to any ESEA requirement and provide a plan for developing a process to consider an assessment that will provide the data needed for the federal and state requirements that is cost effective.

Your immediate action will go a long way in restoring leadership within the Department of Public Instruction on this issue and will provide Wisconsin's educational entities a sense of stability as we look to setting consistent and transparent accountability measures.

We look forward to having our requests addressed and hope you will put the interests of Wisconsin's schools ahead of your department's accusations.

Sincerely,

Paul Farrow
State Senator
33rd Senate District

SERVING WISCONSIN'S 33RD SENATE DISTRICT

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