

## **OpEd Submitted by Urban League To What End? Equity, Education and Standardized Tests**

For decades, “tests” have been used to influence high stakes decisions like grade promotion, and to “track” students into certain academic pathways. Communities of color have plenty of reasons to distrust standardized testing, from racially-biased test questions, to test score misuses that frequently disadvantage students of color. It is no surprise then that communities of color are wary of these assessments. Yet, for all its problems, standardized tests still have tremendous value, especially in our quest for equitable, high quality education for our children.

I believe that standardized tests have their place, but all tests are not created equal. High quality assessments are necessary to provide students, parents, educators, leaders and community members with accurate information on how well *all* our children are being served, how the state is performing in comparison to other states and to unveil inequities that exist in our schools. But we are only able to advocate for equity and excellence if the tools we use to evaluate schools and student achievement are valid and trustworthy. We must demand high quality assessments and we must use the information on student achievement from those tests appropriately and in context to better support our children.

The Urban League is not focused on testing our children for the sake of testing. We want progress for our children. We want all our children to have great experiences in school. We want to be able to hold educators and elected officials accountable for seeing to it that they are providing our children with the preparation they need to be successful in life. Currently, the state is in the midst of some significant revisions to the state standards and the associated tests given to our children. We need definitive and responsive leadership on this issue to get us to a consistent measure of student achievement that is reliable and that is useful in our efforts to support our children. We also need strong monitoring systems to maintain the integrity of the testing process and we need continued consideration and action on providing accommodations to children with special needs in preparation for these tests and during these tests. Finally, we need the state, local districts and schools to be more transparent and timely with the release of test data so that parents, educators and the community can use this information to improve instruction and support for our children and those that are charged with educating them.

Finally, let us be clear also about the importance of keeping these tests in context. While they are valuable they do not determine the value of our children. While they give us important information, they do not give us all the information we need to evaluate the quality of our children’s education or the ability of our children to succeed in work and in life. But they do provide us with information that classwork and projects cannot. High quality state assessments allow us to determine how well our children can compete in a global context. They tell us how well they perform on certain standards for which they should be able to perform with mastery. They show

us how well our students are performing in certain areas so that we may celebrate their gains, and where we need to continue working.

In our constant quest for equity, we need to find the answers to some complex questions. How do we know we have made progress in our quest for equity in education and how do we know if we are preparing our children for success? High quality assessments provide us with important information necessary to answer these big questions but they alone do not answer these questions. Without them, however, we are missing vital information needed to get to the truth. It is time for us to act to ensure transparency, accountability and consistency in Louisiana by implementing high quality assessments - assessments that are of course kept in perspective by using them as *part* of the process to improve education outcomes for all children.