Dr. Scott Mantie  
State of New Hampshire  
Department of Education  
101 Pleasant Street  
Concord, NH 03301  

February 20, 2014  

Dear Dr. Mantie:  

The Nashua Teachers’ Union Executive Board and members of its Board of Directors present at its February meeting have a multitude of concerns regarding the Smarter Balanced Assessment. As educators, while we undoubtedly realize and support the concept that assessment is a necessary component of teaching and learning, we collectively view this particular assessment as inappropriate.  

There are several issues we have discovered in our evaluation of the Smarter Balanced Assessment. They include technological problems, a collective confusion as to what the test is actually measuring in our students, and the developmental appropriateness of the questions found within the test.  

The Smarter Balanced Assessment must be administered on computers with a reliable internet connection. While we understand that many exams are administered online in this technology-friendly day and age, we are highly concerned that the City of Nashua is simply not prepared to take on the technological challenges of administering an online exam to the thousands of students who will be required to take the test. Simply put, the District has some severe technological shortfalls, ranging from unreliable internet connectivity to unstable networks to outdated computers with insufficient monitor sizes. In addition, we do not foresee the District being able to remedy these concerns before the spring of 2015 given the constraints of the Nashua spending cap.  

Another, substantial concern exists regarding the twelve-week testing window for administering the Smarter Balanced Assessment. An obvious, unfair advantage arises for those schools and classes who test last, as they will have received significantly more instruction time on the exam’s content and features versus those students scheduled to take the exam earlier. The comparison data amongst schools would be unreliable.
Most disconcerting, however, is the developmental appropriateness of the questions found within the Smarter Balanced Assessment. The questions are confusing, poorly worded, obviously more designed for adult learners rather than for children, and overly tedious and cumbersome. As teachers in various Nashua schools completed a Smarter Balanced practice test, they echoed again and again the following question: "What exactly is this test attempting to measure?" As educators we are not sure. If professional educators with college degrees and years of teaching experience at specific grade levels are frustrated, think how their students would react to questions on these assessments! We are not arguing that tests and assessments should not be challenging. We are advocating that tests and assessments should consciously veer themselves away from being so aggressively punitive, age inappropriate, and impersonal in nature to the student.

In closing, the Nashua Teachers’ Union Executive Board and the members of its Board of Directors respectfully ask the NH Department of Education to allow the Nashua School District to choose a different state assessment other than the Smarter Balanced Assessment. The NTU feels that the Smarter Balanced Assessment is not age appropriate to the needs and challenges unique to our children. Should you have any questions or concerns regarding our position, please contact us using the information provided below.

Sincerely,

Robert S. Sherman
Nashua Teachers’ Union President
(603) 888-7544
nashuatu@nashuatu.org

CC

Mark Conrad
Superintendent of Schools
City of Nashua

Board of Education
City of Nashua