

**To:** Mr. Robert S. Sherman  
President, Nashua Teachers' Union, American Federation of Teachers Local 1044

**Re:** NTU Letter to Dr. Scott Mantie, State of NH - Department of Education  
Dated February 20, 2014

**Subject:** Open Letter of Support for NTU Statement on Smarter Balanced Assessment

**Date:** February 27, 2014

Dear Mr. Sherman,

We, the undersigned current and former members of the Nashua Board of Education, acting as individuals, join in commending the Nashua Teachers Union for your courageous statements identifying critical issues with the Smarter Balanced Assessment, and your request to the NH Department of Education to allow the Nashua School District to **choose a different state assessment other than the Smarter Balanced Assessment.**

As members of the Board of Education, we have been elected by the citizens of Nashua to exercise due diligence and oversight of the governance of the Nashua School District, SAU 42. It has come to our attention, through discussions with parents and teachers in our district, that a number of problems exist in the proposed assessment methods used by the Smarter Balanced Assessment to evaluate progress in mathematics and English language arts, as established by the Common Core State Standards.

In December 2013, principals and teachers at Fairgrounds Middle School took the practice Smarter Balanced Assessment as a group Professional Development exercise, with disturbing results. Principal John Nelson summarized these results in a letter, published by the Nashua Telegraph on January 28, 2014. Between Principal Nelson's testimony, the Nashua Teachers Union letter, and our personal contacts with Nashua parents and teachers, it has become clearly evident these problems with the Smarter Balanced Assessment are real, and not imagined, as some have claimed. These problems have the potential for harming the enthusiasm of both our students and teachers for public education. Learning, which should be a positive experience, could become a dramatically negative experience for our students by continuing on our current course and pace.

While we all support progress in improving education, one thing we MUST avoid, is pushing the pace of change to the point of failure. Changes brought by the ESEA waiver, the implementation of the Common Core State Standards, and a transition to the Smarter Balanced Assessment, among other changes, have placed too much on the "plate" of our schools, teachers, district and Board as we work to meet the Smarter Balanced Assessment testing deadline of Spring 2015. Moreover, there is little certainty the assessment will be validated or technically ready by Spring 2015.

Opponents of delay initially claimed that only a "tiny minority" of teachers wanted a delay in the Smarter Balanced Assessment, and that the teachers' unions do not support a delay. It is now apparent these claims are incorrect.

We agree with US Education Secretary Arne Duncan who called for an improved “*Assessment 2.0*” on April 30, 2013, which may be used by the Nashua School District and other NH public schools at some future time.

We agree with the American Federation of Teachers – New Hampshire (AFT-NH) which stated in its February 9, 2014 Legislative Update: “*Assessments should be diverse, authentic, test for multiple indicators of student performance and provide information leading to appropriate interventions that help students, teachers and schools improve, not sanctions that undermine them. Development and implementation of such tests must be age appropriate for the students.*” We concur with AFT-NH recommendation that “*the Department of Education should waive the Smarter Balance testing deadline for at least another two years.*”

**We join the Nashua Teachers Union in respectfully asking the NH Department of Education to allow the Nashua School District to choose a different state assessment other than the Smarter Balanced Assessment.**

While there is an undeniable appeal to use modern, “adaptive” student assessment tools, Nashua’s children should not be the “guinea pigs” and “data points” for tests which are not yet ready for ‘prime time’. We should not risk damaging the progress already made by the Nashua School District in improving our curriculum. Nor should we jeopardize the enthusiasm of our children for learning, or the love of our educators for teaching, by using assessment methods that show, by experience, the potential for setbacks to the educational progress of our children.

Sincerely yours,

*David Murotake Ph.D.*

Nashua Board of Education  
Chair, Curriculum and Evaluation Committee  
NH State Representative, Ward 5

*Sandra Ziehm*

Nashua Board of Education  
Chair, Human Resources Committee  
Hillsborough County Commissioner

*Kim Muise*

Clerk, Nashua Board of Education  
Chair, Budget Committee

*Elizabeth Van Tuuyper*

Nashua Board of Education  
Chair, Policy Committee

*Bill Mosher*

Nashua Board of Education  
Former NH State Representative, Ward 5

*Dotty Oden M. Ed.*

Nashua Board of Education  
Retired Nashua Teacher

*Jack Kelley*

Former member, Nashua Board of Education  
NH State Representative, Ward 5