

Editorial: State delays education plan

Sunday

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By The Canton Repository Editorial Board

There was a bit of irony in State Superintendent Paolo DeMaria's announcement Monday that Ohio will delay submitting its proposed education plan to the federal government until September.

The draft form of that plan, which outlines how Ohio's learning standards, report cards, testing and support for disadvantaged schools and students meets the standards set out in the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, was met with sharp criticism for education leaders throughout the state, including Canton City Schools Superintendent Adrian Allison and the Stark Education Partnership, because, among other reasons, the plan did not address the large number of standardized tests students are required to take between kindergarten and graduation.

In attempting to calm the critics of the plan, DeMaria issued a statement announcing its delay.

"From the beginning, we ... have envisioned a more comprehensive strategic planning process that would not be limited by the narrow focus of federal regulations," he wrote.

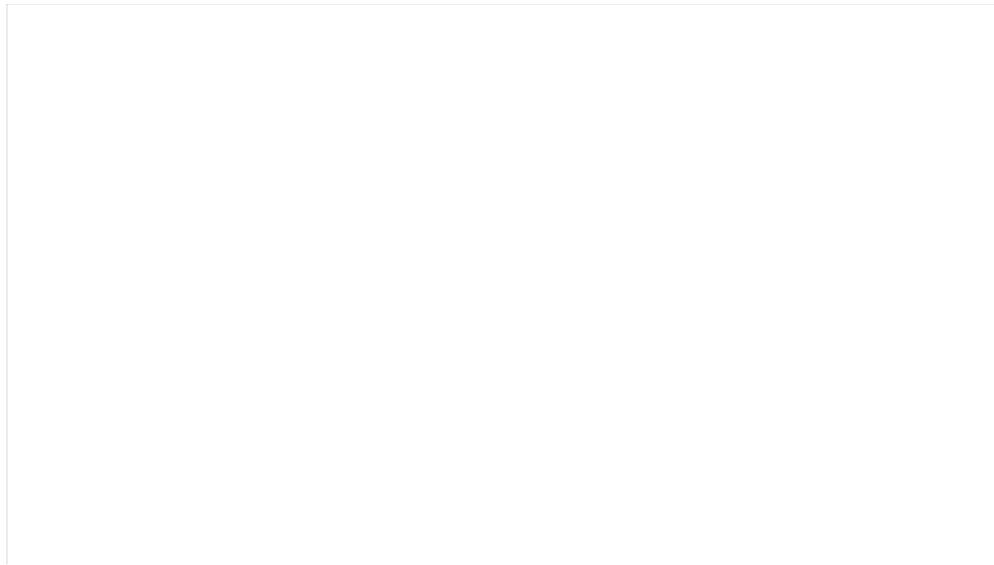
With that, DeMaria unintentionally framed the complaint many educators express about testing. Teachers know full well that it takes "comprehensive strategic planning," to borrow DeMaria's words, to educate students effectively and prepare them to meet the demands of a competitive, global job market, yet

they too often feel "limited by the narrow focus of" standardized tests and the time it takes to prepare students for them. When forced to choose, compliance wins out over comprehensiveness.

Educators like Allison see the pitfalls of this approach and were justified to make their complaints heard.

"They rely on the same ol', same ol' things they did in the past," he told The Canton Repository's Kelli Weir in regard to the proposal. "(Ohio's) accountability system is broken, yet ODE's plan still relies on this same accountability system to determine how it's going to do business."

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As Weir reported last week, the draft of Ohio's ESSA plan does not change the number of tests the state would continue to give. Ohio requires students to take 24 tests, seven more than the federal government requires.

Eliminating some of those tests would help decrease the burden on teachers and students alike and allow them to shift their focus from rote memorization to more substantive methods of education, which Stark Education Partnership President Teresa Pursues referred to as "constructing knowledge."

Stark Education Partnership also wants the state to address how it measures student growth.

We give DeMaria and the Ohio Department of Education credit for heeding the advice of educators and slowing the process. DeMaria formed an Advisory Committee on Assessments to study testing issues.

That committee will meet for the first time Tuesday.

We also applaud the superintendents, teachers and organizations like Stark Education Partnership for speaking up. For too long their voices have gone unheard. We hope a more complete and effective plan results from the work that could occur over the next five months.

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