
Editorial: Time to end school testing insanity

By The Canton Repository Editorial Board

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By now everyone knows the definition of insanity: Doing the same thing over and over and expecting a different result.

On Wednesday, acclaimed speaker/researcher/writer Sir Ken Robinson told an audience comprised mainly of Stark County school administrators, along with members of the local business community, that it is well past time to rethink the basic model for public education in Ohio and across the United States.

We couldn't agree more.

"We have confused raising standards with 'standardization' and testing. It simply has not worked," said Robinson, whose 40-year career has been devoted to teaching and educational research. Instead of rethinking the problem, he said, "We have doubled-down on a testing culture."

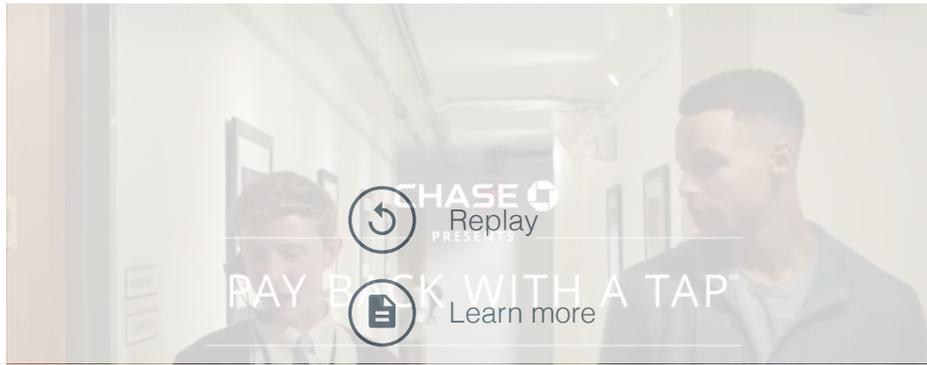
It was fitting that his comments — part of a Stark County Educational Service Center and Stark Education Partnership program — came at First Christian Church in Plain Township because, for many in the room, he was preaching to the choir.

Ohio educators have been saying long and loud that the educational testing system and the state's reliance on it needs to be revised, reformed and rethought.

Many expected a reprieve when the state forged its plan for compliance with the federal Every Student Succeeds Act. Early this year, however, the draft form of that plan roundly was ridiculed for failing to address the large number of standardized tests students are required to take between kindergarten and graduation.

That number stood at 24 in Ohio last school year. The time devoted to testing — and preparing for tests — numbers in the hundreds of hours for school kids each year.

A provision in the recently enacted state budget eliminated two standardized tests. The federal government requires 17 of the 22 tests Ohio will administer this school year.



In Robinson’s opinion, such modest changes won’t alter the outcomes from most public schools in the United States: students who aren’t prepared for their generation’s challenges and job opportunities.

“It’s not enough to improve the current system,” he said, using this analogy: “You couldn’t make enough improvements in the steam engine to reach the moon.”

So what can be done to help kids reach the moon?

“We must promote innovation and forward-thinking,” Robinson said. He is a proponent of STEM education in combination with strong arts programming that promotes critical thinking.

It is expected that Ohio will submit to Washington its revised plan for the Every Student Succeeds Act next month.

We encourage the Ohio Department of Education, under the direction of state Superintendent Paolo DeMaria, to heed Robinson’s advice — “We must be creative, innovative, brave and courageous,” he said. — and take a lead in pushing back on an over-reliance on testing as the main measurement of success.

It’s time to end the testing insanity.

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