

**Statement Regarding Michigan House Bill 4162 (2019)**

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**MDE's OEAA Advisory Committee Member**

**Chair, Senator Dale Zorn's (Ida) Mathematics Alignment Project**

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**Michigan Taxpayer (4767 Stadler Road, Monroe, MI 48162-9424)**

Thank you for the opportunity to address the House Ways and Means Committee this morning.

I have been involved with the required WorkKeys testing under the Michigan Merit Exam since the MME began in 2007. What seemed to initially be a promising tool for students, educators, and schools rapidly turned into a dreaded compliance activity each year for over 100,000 11<sup>th</sup> graders and their school staff. I am in full support of this bill to eliminate the required WorkKeys testing.

I am not the only one eager to see WorkKeys go. In the past two weeks, I have participated in several county and state level meetings. I asked the educators there what their reaction might be to eliminating WorkKeys as a required component of state testing for all students. I'll just summarize their responses as, "How soon can <sup>it</sup> happen?!" Two educators who are also parents responded simultaneously, "Please, don't make my child take WorkKeys!" We are ready – very ready – to stop the mandatory WorkKeys testing.

As a county assessment coordinator, I can speak to the burden the WorkKeys tests put on our local schools and school districts. These tests form the 2<sup>nd</sup> round of three in spring state testing for Michigan's high school 11<sup>th</sup> graders. Schedules are disrupted and often a full day of instructional time is lost, and for what benefit to our students and schools?

The state already provides the full SAT/PSAT suite from grade 8 through grade 11, giving students, their parents, and schools substantial data on each student's performance and growth in reading (fiction and expository text), writing, and high school mathematics. WorkKeys as required for all 11<sup>th</sup> graders is at best a duplication of that time and effort, and at worst a waste of time, effort, and taxpayer money.

I can speak to the mathematics portion of the WorkKeys testing in particular. Until very recently, all questions on the applied mathematics portion were basic skills taught in Michigan schools in the elementary and middle school grades. Even as I look now at sample math items from what may be revised tests, the mathematics content is still that which is taught in grades 3 through 8. Sadly, even should students get a perfect score on the mathematics portion, this generally does not qualify them for entry into a community college technical or certificate program – colleges still apply their placement tests and cut scores. The WorkKeys mathematics concepts and skills are likely to fall at the remedial level for most mathematics placement tests.

Aside from the content mismatch, the WorkKeys tests are no longer counted as part of our student performance for state accountability. Schools and districts get little data back to use for modifying and improving curriculum or instruction, state-level data is unavailable, and ISD/county data is only available to those few with access to student data files via the OEAA Secure Site. Given that accountability is based on SAT and M-STEP performance and growth, and the lack of use of WorkKeys scores for any common purposes for our students and schools, little attention is paid to these assessments. We simply get through the testing day, with midsize and large district needing potentially hundreds of staff hours for testing activities in the months leading up to testing, the testing itself, and in the days afterward.

Some in the Career and Technical Education (CTE) field still value WorkKeys, particularly for the purposes of pre-testing and post-testing students to demonstrate growth. The legislature may wish to consider providing these tests to districts as optional assessments, funded through CTE or talent development monies, similar to the legislatively provided interim/benchmark assessments for K-8. Although, keep in mind, the College Board SAT/PSAT suite now provides in effect pre and post testing as well.

You may wonder about the National Career Readiness Certificate which students can earn through various levels of WorkKeys performance. There may be some employers in the state who require the NCRC as a condition of employment, but I suspect they are few, especially in an economy where a local Wendy's recently advertised on their sign, "Interview this morning, work this afternoon." In conversation with our local administrators and business representatives, local businesses really want three things from entry level employees – and these, WorkKeys cannot provide: a person who consistently shows up, a person who is trainable, and a person who can pass a drug test.

I suggest to you that, especially given the major drop in federal corporate income tax rates, from a maximum of 35% to 21% - a 40% drop in federal taxes, any Michigan businesses that wish to have potential employees screened via WorkKeys have money to pay for this service. In 2019, \$4.4 million is being spent for WorkKeys by the Michigan Legislature and the Michigan Department of Education; these funds could instead be put to much more productive use – use that can truly change students' lives and support the pursuit of training in the skilled trades and mid-skill STEM fields. One of several possible ways the legislature might support such a transformation would be to expand funding for Senator Dale Zorn's high school-college mathematics alignment project – a legislatively funded project intended to remove barriers inadvertently keeping interested Michiganders from accessing training in the skilled trades and mid-level technical fields at our Michigan community colleges in particular.

In summary, I urge you to support the elimination of WorkKeys as a required portion of state testing and suggest using that \$4.4 million to fund projects much more likely to provide businesses with the skilled employees they need.

Thank you very much. I would be happy to take your questions now.

