



*Common Ground is a working group of Florida education advocacy organizations, representing a broad political spectrum, standing together to ensure access to a high quality education for every child.*

**For Immediate Release - March 26, 2017**

**Contact:**

Dr. Karen Effrem 888-376-5550

Dr. Sue Woltanski 305-240-1565

**Bi-Partisan Education Coalition Warns of Plummeting School Grades & Property Values if SB926 Passes**

If SB926 passes, expect school grades, property values, and tax revenue to plummet. This bill, deceptively named "Fewer, Better Tests," written by Jeb Bush's Foundation for Florida's Future and sponsored by Senator Anitere Flores, will be heard by the Senate Education Committee Monday, March 27th at 1:30pm.

Last Tuesday, Tallahassee legislators were given the chance to workshop two distinct education accountability bills. One, SB964, is sponsored by a bipartisan group of seven senators, led by Senators Montford and Lee. SB964 eliminates the 9<sup>th</sup> grade FSA and all but two of the current state End of Course exams, allows districts to use the SAT or ACT in place of FSA testing, eliminates VAM (returning teacher evaluation decisions to the local level) and allows paper and pencil testing for students, providing welcome relief from the current test and punish system. Not only does SB 964 have widespread legislative support, it also received very broad public support with many organizations speaking in favor and none opposed.

Sadly, the other bill, SB926, does *not* eliminate *any* tests, but contains deceptive proficiency language that could be used to raise the achievement level required to pass the FSA to above grade level to correspond to proficiency on the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Aligning FSA passing scores to NAEP Proficiency is admitted to be unrealistic, even by the US Department of Education, and was advocated against by Education Commissioner Pam Stewart and the State Board of Education in January 2016. Such alignment would lead to a dramatic drop in the passing rate, for the test required for graduation, from 51% to an estimated 39%. SB926 will have devastating effects on our public schools, causing school grades to plummet. The bill has no bipartisan support and received significant criticism during the workshop.

"Senate Bill 926 should be called the "Fewer Will Pass the Tests" Bill. The effects of the proficiency language in SB926 will result in lower passing rates, more retention and remediation, lower graduation rates and devastating drops in school grades, property values, and, consequently, school district tax revenue," said Dr. Sue Woltanski, a member of Common Ground, founder of Minimize Testing/Maximize Learning and cowriter of the Accountabaloney Blog, "This is a clear attempt by the Foundation to override the decisions made by the State Board of Education and the Department of Education after months of deliberation involving expert testimony, community input, educator and reactor panels."

"The difference between these two bills could not be starker," said Dr. Karen Effrem, Executive Director of the Florida Stop Common Core Coalition, a statewide organization of over 50 groups that is also a part of the Common Ground bipartisan coalition. "After the overwhelming support for Senator Montford's SB 964 during the committee workshop, we are profoundly disappointed to see this very problematic and far less well supported SB 926 on the calendar and that the bipartisan, genuinely helpful bill is nowhere to be found. Common Ground strongly supports SB 964, and we hope to either have this bill heard or have all of it included in any education bill that moves forward."

Common Ground, a working group of Florida education advocacy organizations, representing a broad political spectrum, standing together to ensure access to high quality education for every child, strongly opposes this bill. For more details on this critical education issue, please consult our Fact Sheet at <http://bit.ly/2nkQ05X>.