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## **CPS IG Calls for Test Security Expert to Improve CPS Test Administration and Monitoring**

Chicago — The CPS Office of Inspector General has found a concerning level of unusually long test durations, high pause counts and other irregularities during CPS's Spring 2018 administration of an annual high-stakes test for elementary-grade students.

A series of data analyses by the OIG's Performance Analysis Unit uncovered some unusual patterns in these untimed, computer-based tests. The OIG found that:

- One out of four CPS tests in grades 3 to 8 took at least twice the national duration average to complete; some took three, four and five times. At some CPS schools, a test that the average student nationally completes in roughly an hour turned into a multi-day, and in a few cases, a week-long event.
- Average CPS durations in every grade and subject have been above the national norm since at least 2016 and have increased every year since, based on norms released in August 2018.
- Some 2018 tests were paused 5, 10, 20 and, at a handful of schools, more than 40 times. Pause rates were highest in seventh grade, where results impact admission to selective-enrollment high schools, and eighth grade, where graduation can be affected. Roughly 7 percent of seventh- and eighth-grade tests contained at least five pauses.
- Non-Diverse Learners were more likely to have long durations and high pause counts than Diverse Learners. Long durations and high pause counts tended to cluster in certain schools.
- In general, as individual test durations and pause counts increased, so did the occurrence of unusually large test gains.

Of top concern is the fact that even if these unusual patterns are due to benign behavior, they can make CPS results less meaningful because they reflect tests taken

under different conditions than those of the national sample to which CPS tests are compared, according to experts contacted by the OIG.

To probe what could be causing such irregularities the OIG interviewed 20 students and 10 teachers, almost all in schools with unusual results. This produced reports of a variety of activities, including abuses of some of the test's distinctive features, questionable administration practices, attempts to game the test and even cheating.

Finally, although an April 2018 CPS Audit on test administration led to some reforms, the OIG found that clearly more are needed.

As a result, the OIG issued eight recommendations aimed at improving CPS's test training, administration and monitoring. Key among them was that CPS hire a test security expert to help the district implement the OIG's recommendations. CPS agreed to all eight OIG recommendations.

"Currently, CPS is administering its Spring elementary-grade tests without the security protocols necessary for an assessment that carries such high stakes for so many parties," IG Nicholas Schuler said. "We are glad to see that CPS is taking our recommendations so seriously."

The accuracy of this particular test's results is critical due to the numerous stakes attached to it — for not only students but also teachers, principals and schools.

The OIG was especially concerned about the unusually long durations some tests exhibited. Excessive durations can make it difficult to accurately compare results to national norming samples, the test vendor said. They also eat up instructional time.

Other concerns revolved around pauses. OIG interviews uncovered indications the test's pause function was being abused in some extreme cases. For example, the OIG was told that some students were letting difficult questions time out so they could get new questions and, in a few cases, some proctors were pausing the test when a student was stumped in order to produce a new question. Both tactics can affect test validity, the test vendor said.

The OIG recommended addressing such problems on the front end — by improving training and test administration. The OIG also is concerned that, on the back end, CPS's standard data set does not include certain information that would be useful to auditors and investigators, including the number of pauses per test; who paused the test; how many days each test took; and, critically, the identity of each test's proctor.

After the conclusion of the OIG's performance review, the test vendor released new guidance in December 2019 addressing some of the excessive duration and pause issues raised by the OIG. This new guidance stated that average test durations of classrooms and grade levels "should not substantially differ" from test norms.

This latest guidance cited as an example one fifth-grade classroom that was averaging 2½ hours to complete its Spring tests — an average described as beyond

the 99th percentile of all such tests in that grade. The new guidance cautioned that “Durations this long invalidate comparisons between [these students’] test results and [the test company’s] norms, because the conditions vary so much from the typical test durations for students [nationwide].”

This latest guidance confirms that OIG concerns were warranted and that CPS needs to rein in its durations.

The OIG recommended that CPS overhaul its procedures for administering and monitoring this untimed, high-stakes test by:

- Reducing durations, preferably by establishing test time limits for general education students. In fact, two test experts recommended against using an untimed test in a high-stakes situation.
- Taking concrete steps to shrink pause counts.
- Finding an auditable way to record each test’s proctor, preferably in a test data field, so test results can be analyzed by proctor.
- Using new proctor data to identify which proctors to audit during testing, rather than which classrooms.
- Barring those Math and Reading teachers whose evaluations are tied to the growth of their students’ test results from being their students’ sole proctors. Even the test vendor recommends two proctors in high-stakes situations.
- Bolstering CPS test training and a five-question quiz that must be passed to proctor the test. Clear examples of improper behavior should be covered in the training. The OIG should be cited as an office to be contacted about test-irregularity concerns.
- Inserting penalties for test cheating in the Test Security Agreement all proctors must sign.
- Hiring a test security expert to help CPS implement these and other reforms. If the current test vendor cannot provide recommended security features, the test security expert should help CPS write a proposal for a new test contract.

The OIG’s Performance Analysis Unit generally focuses on using data to identify broad-scale issues and on making systemwide recommendations for improvement. Improving future administrations of this test, rather than doing a deep individual dive into every test with an unusual result, was the focus of this performance review.

The OIG urges any CPS employees, students or parents with concerns about possible testing irregularities to call the OIG at 773-48-FRAUD. Complaints also can be filed online at [cpsoig.org/complaint-form.html](https://cpsoig.org/complaint-form.html).