

Island Park Union Free School District

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DR. ROSMARIE T. BOVINO
SUPERINTENDENT OF SCHOOLS

March 1, 2016

Dear Parents and Guardians:

As an educator and parent, I believe it is important for youngsters to develop confidence in their ability to demonstrate what they know in a myriad of ways. One way is through test taking. We have all taken many tests throughout our lives. Testing has been and continues to be a reality for all of us. Every profession today demands testing as a pre-requisite to job acceptance and promotion. Electricians, civil service workers, teachers, accountants, doctors, nurses, healthcare technicians, automotive service technicians, cosmetologists, etc must demonstrate mastery on formal tests established by their respective industry or licensing agency.

Changes at the Federal and State Levels

As we approach testing season, I am writing to make you aware that change is in the air at the State Education Department (SED). On July 6, a new Commissioner of Education, MaryEllen Elia, was appointed. Recognizing that high stakes testing at the elementary and middle school levels has been excessive, substantive steps have been taken by the federal and state governments as well as the Commissioner of Education and Board of Regents during the past eight months to reduce testing and find common ground with respect to teacher evaluation and the Common Core curriculum.

On Dec. 10, 2015, new federal legislation was approved by Congress and the President giving states more freedom over local assessments and evaluations. That same day, Governor Cuomo's task force called for revisions to the state's Common Core standards and a moratorium on the use of student state test scores in teacher evaluations was declared. Subsequently, the Regents enacted a moratorium for the next four years, minimizing the impact of high stakes testing on teacher evaluation. To this end, teachers will receive two sets of scores beginning September 2016; one that includes State tests and another that does not.

Changes in the State Assessments

In response to letters and actions by school administrators, teachers, and parents, the NY State Education Department (SED) has announced changes to how it will test students this spring:

- All tests will be untimed. Students will be able to work at a more leisurely pace in a less stressful environment.
- 3rd and 4th grade ELA tests will have four reading passages (one fewer than last year), 24 multiple choice questions (six fewer than last year), and seven short essays (one fewer than last year).
- 5th through 8th grade ELA tests will have five reading passages (one fewer than last year), 35 multiple choice questions (seven fewer than last year), and seven short essays (one fewer than last year).
- 3rd grade math tests will have 44 multiple choice questions (four fewer than last year).
- 4th and 5th grade math tests will have 45 multiple choice questions (four fewer than last year).
- 6th through 8th grade math tests will have 51 multiple choice questions (four fewer than last year).

Changes in District Testing

In addition to the SED changes, *the District responded immediately to Congress' legislation by reducing*
(See other side.)

our local testing program. We eliminated the January Northwest Evaluation Association (NWEA) exam. Next year, we will cut the amount of NWEA exam time further. Instead of measuring progress in September and May, we will administer NWEAs in May only and assess student progress May to May.

The Importance of NWEA Exams

Putting aside the new statewide high stakes testing, *local student assessment has always been part of the District's educational process.* Our teachers and principals need to know if their students are making progress in the curriculum approved by their Board of Education. Similarly, local Boards have always evaluated teacher performance based, in part, on their students' educational progress.

The NWEA (also called MAP) is a student assessment the District has used for the past six years and found very valuable. It predates the SED's implementation of the Common Core curriculum and the current high stakes state assessments used to formulate student growth rates as part of evaluating teacher performance. The primary purpose of the NWEA is to evaluate your child's individual strengths and weaknesses on a national normative basis. The results enable us to monitor each student's progress from year to year relative to how other students across the country perform. For instructional purposes, the NWEAs help us identify the skills and content that each student has not yet mastered; they also enable us to create flexible groupings within a class of students with similar achievement levels or areas in need of further instruction. *The NWEAs provide critical diagnostic information for targeted instruction that teachers depend upon.* In addition, patterns of student errors provide indicators of where our curriculum or instruction is not meeting students' needs.

As a secondary purpose, the data from the NWEAs are used to create Student Learning Objectives (SLOs) for teachers who do not administer the NYS ELA, math, and science assessments or Regents exams. As a point of information, Island Park students have consistently demonstrated statistically significant growth on the NWEA examinations from September to May. With respect to teacher evaluation, they are a critical factor, which has actually benefited our teachers because they provide a metric that increases teachers' individual annual professional performance review scores. *Without the NWEA results, we have no local scores to counterbalance the state scores ascribed to both students and teachers; they end up carrying too much weight.*

For the reasons explained above, *I respectfully urge you to support your child's participation in the newly revised untimed ELA and math state assessments for grades 3-8 in April as well as the science state assessments later in the spring for grades 4 and 8.* Nevertheless, it is your prerogative to refuse state tests for your child. Should you do so, I urge you to notify us no later than March 18. We must plan the untimed testing arrangements for all of the children who will be participating in the state assessments including those with legal testing modifications. We would also like to plan alternative arrangements for students who may not participate. Scheduling test proctors, supervisors, and room availability is an arduous task for our principals.

Irrespective of the state tests, I encourage you to see the value of your child's participation in the local NWEA exams in May since this test is a long-standing component of our curriculum and will not be administered in September. These results provide valid and reliable information for purposeful and prescriptive teaching.

Your consideration of this matter is greatly appreciated. Thank you.

Very truly yours,

Rosmarie T. Bovino

Rosmarie T. Bovino, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools

cc: Board of Education