

CHELMSFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Dr. Linda Hirsch, Assistant Superintendent

March 20, 2017

Dear Parent/Guardian:

Every year, there are a small number of parents across the state that request that their children not participate in the Massachusetts annual statewide student assessments. The intent of this letter is to provide some information on this issue.

State law (G.L. c.69, s.11) requires that all students who are educated with Massachusetts' public funds participate in a statewide student assessment program under the direction of the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education. This requirement was first enacted as part of the landmark 1993 Massachusetts education reform law. Neither the Commonwealth nor Congress provides an "opt-out" provision for parents to remove their children from participating. In short, participation in the statewide student assessment program is mandatory.

The Board of Elementary and Secondary Education voted in November 2015 to maintain a test that is unique to the Commonwealth that draws questions from the existing MCAS, some of its questions from the PARCC assessment, and some questions created specifically for the next-generation MCAS. For the spring 2017, test administration for the new next-generation MCAS will be administered to students in grades 3-8 for both English language arts and mathematics. The Board has also voted to transition to a computer-based testing for grades 4 and 8.

On March 6, 2017, the Commissioner of Education for the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, Dr. Mitchell Chester, provided guidance to school districts regarding what he termed "Refusals to Participate in State Tests." In this guidance, Commissioner Chester notes:

- Test results help parents gauge whether their children are making academic progress.
- Test results help educators identify strengths and weaknesses in their curricula and instructional methods.
- a student's participation in statewide testing helps provide context to other students in the same school, students in other schools within the district, and students in other districts. Failure to participate denies this perspective not only to the student who refuses to participate, but also to other students and parents in the school, district, and statewide.
- Test results help the state target additional resources to underperforming schools.
- Test results help document our progress to the Governor and the Legislature as we seek to ensure adequate funding for all our schools.

Additionally, schools where the student participation rate falls below an established benchmark may have their accountability data jeopardized should student participation not meet the benchmark criterion. It is critically important that all of our students participate in the spring 2017 statewide assessment, for the data we receive is invaluable to us as a school district as we continue to evaluate where we are today, where we need and hope to be in the future, and how we can best prepare our students to meet their educational goals.

CHELMSFORD PUBLIC SCHOOLS

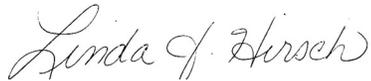
Dr. Linda Hirsch, Assistant Superintendent

As there is no “opt-out” provision for state testing, principals are obligated to present the assessment to students when they come to school during the testing windows. Students who refuse to take the MCAS test either of his/her own volition or at the direction of a parent may remain in the testing room as long as they are sitting quietly and are not interfering with other students. There is no requirement to provide formal or informal instruction to the students during the test period. If a student becomes disruptive, they will be removed from the testing room and placed in a safe location until testing is completed and regular classroom instruction resumes. Given that statewide-standardized tests are a legal requirement, it is DESE’s expectation that all students will participate.

We understand there are parental concerns regarding the amount of testing in our schools today and recognize that some parents may disagree with the policies relating to student assessments. However, DESE is gathering data on what tests are being given and how the results are being used to help guide future policy decisions. It is vital that we consider the benefits of why we use assessments and what is lost when students do not participate.

More information about the next-generation MCAS, including information for parents, is available online on the DESE MCAS page at <http://www.doe.mass.edu/mcas/>. Questions relating to testing refusals can be directed to Deputy Commissioner Jeff Wulfson at jwulfson@doe.mass.edu.

Sincerely,



Linda Hirsch, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent of Schools