

BERNARDS TOWNSHIP PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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NICK MARKARIAN
Superintendent of Schools

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April 8, 2015

Dear Parent/Guardian:

The second portion of the PARCC test known as the EOY (End of Year) is due to be administered in the schools beginning on April 21, 2015 and extending into May. The specific details of each school's schedule will be issued by the school principals and posted on DynaCal. Please be sure to review communications from principals carefully. Given our experiences with the first part of the PARCC test it may be that adjustments are made to some of our original plans in an attempt to improve the overall testing process. Assuring each child the opportunity to complete the PARCC test pursuant to state law remains an important objective for school districts. In order for a child to complete the PARCC test with a valid score, the child needs to participate in the EOY portion of the test. I encourage all parents to have their children participate in the test. However, I understand that some parents have already refused the first portion of the PARCC test (known as the PBA or Performance Based Assessment); to clarify all of the possible scenarios please see below.

Scenario 1: The first part of the PARCC test has been refused and the parent wishes to refuse the second part.

Parents must notify schools of their intention to refuse using the same email process as with the PBA however since it is impossible for these students to earn a valid test score parents may submit one notice to cover all test dates. The notice may be emailed on any date in advance of the testing, in fact the sooner the better.*

Scenario 2: The first part of the PARCC test has been refused but the child wishes to participate in the second part.

Parents must notify the school ASAP using the appropriate email address to ensure that the test is ready for the child.*

Scenario 3: The child participated in the first part of the PARCC test but intends to refuse the second part.

Parents must follow the procedures for refusing the test on each day it is being administered according to page 2 below.

Please keep in mind that as with all days of school we must still follow our regular attendance procedures. Furthermore, our district policy requires students to be marked as present in school (minimum of 4 hours) in order to participate in co-curricular activities and sports. We greatly appreciate your cooperation and your child's participation in the required state testing program.

Sincerely,



Nick Markarian

*Please use the email addresses for the appropriate school as they are listed on the middle of the next page.

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February 26, 2015

Dear Parent/Guardian:

You are receiving this letter as a follow up to the letter I sent you on the subject of PARCC test refusal. My original letter to you is provided at the end of this correspondence for your reference. To remind you, my first letter was to explain that I could not accept PARCC refusals in advance of testing days and to ask you to reconsider and have your child(ren) take the PARCC test. I understand that there are people who remain unconvinced and still plan to refuse the test and also have asked for additional details about the refusal process. Below I will attempt to further clarify the refusal procedure with some general points as well as some additional details by school level in the case where a child is absent for the full school day.

- For **each day** of the *regular* test administration (not make-up) students must submit a note explaining their test refusal. Students who refuse the regular administration will not be scheduled for make-up.
- Students reporting to school on time during a testing day must report to their testing location and submit the refusal notice to the teacher/test proctor. The proctor will direct them to report to a study location.
- Students who report to school late must report to the main office and submit their refusal notice. Late arriving students should report at 11AM at the elementary school level and 9:45AM at the middle school level.
- Students who do not report to school at all because of test refusal still need to submit a notice **on each day of testing**. The notice can simply be emailed to the school *describing the reason for absence from school as PARCC test refusal*. It is not necessary to deliver the notice in person that day. On each day of the test, please email your notice of absence to your School Test Coordinator **and** Attendance Officer as follows:

Cedar Hill Elementary School: jmollica@bernardsboe.com and alynn@bernardsboe.com
Oak Street Elementary School: jcosta@bernardsboe.com and smedenilla@bernardsboe.com
Liberty Corner Elementary School: kpecoraro@bernardsboe.com and ryoutkus@bernardsboe.com
Mount Prospect Elementary School: jhozeny@bernardsboe.com and tlane@bernardsboe.com
William Annin Middle School: khudock@bernardsboe.com and dpersak@bernardsboe.com
Ridge High School: tthorp@bernardsboe.com and gparil@bernardsboe.com

- Due to the complicated attendance procedures on PARCC testing days, we ask that there be no requests for early dismissals. This is especially critical at Ridge High School where due to the special PARCC schedule any early dismissal would be counted as an absence as the four hour minimum attendance would not be met.

Please be reminded that on days that students are absent from school they are not eligible to participate in any after school activities such as clubs, practices, sporting competitions etc. Students absent from school without parental knowledge/permission and school notification will be handled in accordance with the student handbook. Student handbooks are posted on the district website.

In closing, for the reasons I described in my first letter below, I urge all parents to have their children tested. If you have any questions please reach out to me or one of the school principals.

Sincerely,



Nick Markarian

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February 12, 2015

Dear Parent/Guardian:

You are receiving this letter in response to your correspondence in which you indicated that your child(ren) would not be taking the state's new assessment known as the PARCC test. I thank you for your patience in awaiting a reply as the district attempted to gather information necessary to make as informed a response as possible. In the two bullets below, I would like to share with you what I have learned by consulting with NJDOE officials and legal counsel:

- All students are expected to take the state test, please see the excerpted state code which explains this issue as follows:

6A: 8-4.1(d) Pursuant to (b) and (c) above, all students at grade levels three through 12, and at any other grade(s) designated by the Commissioner pursuant to (a) above, shall take all appropriate Statewide assessments as scheduled.

- Because of the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2001 schools that do not have 95% of their eligible students participating in the state test (PARCC) will not meet the minimum level of participation and can therefore not meet any of the target proficiency levels no matter how well tested students perform. This means that schools with poor participation rates will be represented in a negative way in the NJ School Performance Reports that are issued annually by the New Jersey Department of Education. Furthermore, not meeting the participation rates results in corrective action plans for schools (which can bring their own burdens and expense) and the possible loss of federal aid to New Jersey which could translate into the loss of funding for our district. While New Jersey does have a waiver related to NCLB, we have been advised by the NJDOE that the waiver does not speak to releasing our state from the testing requirements.

In addition to the legal issues there are also the practical considerations. The orderly operation of a school district requires adherence to school rules and the need for students to follow the direction of the adults. Teachers administering the state test are simply doing their job. I am very concerned about the confusion that can result if students have mixed messages about what they are supposed to be doing in school. I am very concerned about children, teachers, and administrators getting caught up in a political issue that is driven by lawmakers. I know that to do the best we can for students; adults need to be unified in purpose, all pulling in the same direction, building positive relationships and working with children to send consistent messages. I am worried that this requisite solidarity to achieve the most important goal in the world, our children's success, is being fragmented. I'm concerned that a battle that should be taking place at the state house is going to end up in our classrooms and be damaging to the relationships necessary for us to accomplish the greater mission that hinges on our collective teamwork. I'm asking for your help in separating the need to comply with the long standing requirement to participate in state testing from the source of that need.

So in response to your letter I am going to ask you to please reconsider refusing the PARCC test. Look at all the information posted on our district website [here](#). Consider that the SAT and ACT will be moving into alignment with the Common Core Standards and that they (like many other tests our students will be taking) are going to be administered on computers in the very near future. Think of our PARCC test as great practice and experience if nothing else. Consider that PARCC results have no bearing whatsoever on the grades the teachers issue each marking period. Be mindful of the fact that PARCC results won't be available until October of 2015 at the earliest, so they can't be used to make class placements for September. Reflect on the fact that while we have yet to see any of the post-PARCC test student reports, we have been assured that the individual student test results will provide much more useful data than prior state tests. Finally, I would encourage you to contemplate the use of the democratic process as a way of modeling to your child an alternative way to express your position and achieve legislative change.

Obviously, I can't make any promises. The test might not work out in the long term for New Jersey, but again I ask you to reconsider your stance and give the test a chance. If there is any way I can help you as you mull this issue over please

let me know. I would be more than happy to speak to or meet with any parent. I hope that you will support us as we are doing our job, and not make a decision that could have negative ramifications for our district.

Ultimately I know that there is nothing I or anyone else can do to force a child to test, and I would not want to. Furthermore our relationship with parents is precious and something I take very seriously because I know our partnerships are the only way to maximum success. So if in spite of the law and everything I have asked you to consider you feel that you still must refuse this test I will explain a procedure for you to follow.

First understand that there is no mechanism or guidance of any kind whereby I am permitted to validate a parent's refusal for their child to be tested without simultaneously violating the law and regulations which require that I test all students. Accepting a refusal in advance of the test could be construed as encouraging or allowing opt-out before the pupil has even been provided the opportunity to have the test administered and administering the test to all students is clearly required by law. Given this and everything I have enumerated above I am unable to sanction any *advance* refusal notice. However if the pupil reports to their testing location and is given the opportunity to test and refuses that opportunity, the test refusal can be processed. Below outlines what needs to occur in the two likely refusal scenarios.

1) Test is being refused and pupil is coming to school late or not coming to school at all for the testing:

Normal procedures of being late or absent from school will apply. The parent/guardian must submit a **signed** and **dated** letter explaining the tardy or absence as due to test refusal for **each day** of the test administration. Students will be recorded as absent or tardy however the submission of the letter on each day will excuse the pupil from any consequence as a result of being absent or tardy.

2) Test is being refused and the pupil is reporting to school on time.

The parent/guardian must prepare and **sign** a **dated** letter explaining the test refusal for the child to hand to their teacher immediately upon arriving to the testing location **each day**. The teacher will then direct the student as to where to go. Building principals have the discretion to manage students who refuse to test by having them stay in the testing room or by moving them to an alternate location as is necessary in order to maintain the integrity of the testing environment. No alternative educational programs will be developed or provided for students who are not testing. Students will be expected to have recreational reading materials to read quietly; they will not be asked to sit and stare.

In each of the above cases the test proctor will follow the state prescribed protocols for how to code the test refusal. The **dated letter for each day** of refused testing is necessary as documentation since we are required to file irregularity reports for each test refusal on each day. To be clear, any test refusal requires a refusal letter *for each day of the regular test administration*, students without such a letter will be expected to test or scheduled to take a make-up test. Therefore, if you do reconsider your position and have your child test, you need take no further action, simply do not supply your child with a refusal letter for the testing days.

Hopefully, you will reconsider your initial letter to me and have your child test thus making the process outlined above unnecessary. I can't emphasize enough that a preponderance of test refusals could result in negative consequences for our schools and district. Again, we are preparing for all students to be tested, that is our charge. We expect that parents will support us as we do our job by sending children to school well-rested, well-fed and ready to meet the PARCC challenge to show New Jersey and the rest of the nation how excellent our students are. Standardized tests have always been a time where the students can use our collective encouragement. I can assure you that in an effort to minimize student stress levels, I will have the staff instill a "do your best and forget the rest" philosophy with the children and I would suggest you do the same.

Should state officials make any changes which would impact any of the above, I will communicate with you again. In the meantime, I thank you for your model citizenship and support in making our schools the amazing places that they are.

Sincerely,



Nick Markarian