



BRUNSWICK SCHOOL DEPARTMENT

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Dear Parents/Guardians:

Annual state testing will begin in Brunswick on April 28, 2015, as required by federal law, No Child Left Behind. After five years the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) will be replaced by the Maine Educational Assessment (MEA) for Mathematics and English/Language Arts developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) for grades 3-8. Grade 11 will no longer take the SAT as a requirement but it will be offered to our students voluntarily. The required SAT will be replaced by a SBAC developed test. Science testing, required in grades 5, 8, and 11, will continue with the same MEA Science tests that we have been using.

The importance of standardized testing is that it gives us data about what and how our students are learning. It allows us to break down the results to determine areas of instruction that may need a different approach or sequence. It gives us information to compare our students with their state peers and gives us a measure to identify struggling learners.

The flip side of this issue is that the bar of proficiency has been significantly raised and the content and format of the assessment will be significantly changed. The State Department of Education has said that the state issued report cards will be waived for one year, yet the results of this year's test will become the baseline from which all districts will be judged.

Technology will play a significant role in the administration of the MEA. All teachers involved in the testing must be certified to participate. Due to our participation in the pilot test last year we feel that we are in fairly good standing.

Difficulties with how each piece of technology portrays the test are currently being worked on by AIR, a company working with the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. The Department of Education has also hired a team of technology professionals to help districts with testing logistics.

As part of its requirement, federal law, No Child Left Behind, states that 95% of each sub-group of the student population be tested annually. If any sub-group is below that threshold, the school the student attends automatically becomes a school in need of improvement. Currently if this happens in Maine the school is automatically given an "F" on the state report card, and also falls into the category of a school in need of improvement. Once in that category the school must develop a school improvement plan with state oversight and show progress annually based on that plan.

This year the Maine Department of Education has said that it does not intend any state-initiated penalties for schools that don't reach the 95% participation rate this year if it is clear that: (a) it is a result of parents exercising their rights to opt their child out; (b) efforts were made by the school/district to educate parents and the public about the benefits of the assessment; and (c) all students were given the opportunity to participate.

You may have further questions about the testing that will begin on April 28, 2015. More information will be coming from your building principal. You may be deliberating whether or not to have your child participate. Currently there is nothing in Maine statute that prohibits parents from choosing not to have their child participate. These questions and others may be asked of the building principals who are available to address your individual needs.

We will be offering the opportunity to take the state assessment to all students. We will be available to answer your questions and concerns and will respect your individual decisions. Thank you if you've taken the opportunity to read this information. We certainly live in interesting times.

Sincerely,



Paul Perzanoski
Superintendent of Schools