



City Honors School

AT FOSDICK-MASTEN PARK

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April 4, 2016

Dear City Honors Middle School Parents and Guardians:

On Tuesday morning, our students will begin participation in annual New York State Assessments for mathematics and ELA.

Student refusal of the New York State assessments has historically been low at City Honors. This year we have seen even less activity around this topic, and I believe most parents understand that our new Commissioner of Education, Dr. Mary Ellen Elia, has made aggressive changes to the assessments to satisfy both labor and student-centered concerns. However, several of the written parent communications that we have received to this point reflect outdated or incorrect information that appears to have been derived from templates found on social media. I would like to provide the following clarifications:

- New York State Assessments are no longer tied to teacher and principal evaluations.
- The state has done away with the previous assessments given to students over the past few years. This year's assessments have been developed by a new organization, with New York State teachers selecting the questions.
- The number of questions and predicted time to complete the assessments has been reduced again this year.
- Perhaps my favorite change -- students will have unlimited time to complete the assessments (as a student who needed more time, I can tell you I would have benefitted greatly from this feature if they had it back when I was taking the old California Achievement tests in elementary school!)

I cannot speak for other schools, but I can tell you that our teachers use the information from these assessments to plan and adjust their teaching and set goals for themselves as educators. I think some of the confusion has arisen because parents receive such generic summary reports for their child from the state. I know that Dr. Elia is changing this. Please be assured that our instructional teams at CHS have access to detailed item and skill-specific information about the areas where our students succeed and where they may need assistance. Like any other profession, this information helps us to keep getting better at the work that we do. Any contemporary educator who is not doing this is doomed to the old days of "spray and pray," where we guessed at what we should teach and ignored the personal needs of the individual student.

I think our parents know by now that I have been fierce in my stance as a moderate on these issues. For some parents, requesting that their child refuse the assessments over the past two years was a last resort. I am saddened by the energy exerted by those looking to continue to bring our children into adult politics even after Dr. Elia's changes. I understand that certain elected officials are desperate for the campaign funding that comes from interest groups, but enough is enough. Let our children have some peace.

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I believe Dr. Elia's changes bring us to a point of moderation. If these expectations are too much pressure on a child, teacher or principal, I do not know what kind of standard we are setting for the next generation. The educators in our building are readying children for the demanding course and testing challenges that come with attending City Honors. I cannot get on board with those who oppose a school's ability to monitor student progress to a state standard. As an International Baccalaureate principal who is formally charged with encouraging students to be "responsible risk-takers" and develop future leaders for our city, I also cannot accept teaching our children to cower from reasonable challenges.

Your child need not study for these assessments or worry about a grade being attached to them. They are an annual diagnostic used to understand how we can best support students and improve our own work as educators. I speak to our middle school students only once a year about these assessments. In my eleventh year as principal, I did so this morning when I reminded them to get a good night's rest, a full and healthy breakfast, and give their very best effort for their school and city.

Sincerely,



William A. Kresse, Ph.D.
Principal

