

*News from Commissioner Mitchell Chester & the  
MA Department of Elementary and Secondary Education*

## Commissioner's Weekly Update - March 13, 2015

### **Assessment Updates**

#### **PARCC Tests to Begin:**

More than [200,000 Massachusetts students in grades 3-8](#) will take mathematics and English language arts tests developed by the [Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers \(PARCC\)](#) this spring as part of Massachusetts' unique, two-year test drive of the assessment system. The districts administering PARCC represent slightly more than half of the state's grades 3-8 districts, and the first tests will start Monday. Students in 11 other states have already completed more than 2 million PARCC tests.

Most of the Massachusetts districts that have chosen to use PARCC this spring will have at least some of their students take the test on a computer. The Department used the lessons from the spring 2014 field tests to help districts prepare for this spring's tests, but technical issues may arise. When faced with such an issue, **schools should first call PARCC support at [1-888-493-9888](tel:1-888-493-9888)** and get a ticket number. If necessary, schools can then call ESE at [781-338-3625](tel:781-338-3625).

This spring's PARCC results will be reported to students and families during the 2015-16 school year, and the Board of Elementary and Secondary Education will vote in fall 2015 whether to adopt PARCC. The Department would like to thank all of the districts that are helping the Board test whether PARCC is the right 21<sup>st</sup>-century test for Massachusetts students. More information about PARCC, including materials designed for parents, is [available on our website](#). Anyone with questions about PARCC can email [parcc@doe.mass.edu](mailto:parcc@doe.mass.edu).

#### **Refusal to Take a Statewide Standardized Test:**

Superintendents and principals are reminded that there is no provision in Massachusetts state law for parents to “opt out” of the annual statewide assessment program. (See [MCAS and PARCC Participation Requirements, Oct. 15, 2014](#).) This program is an important component of the Commonwealth's public education system, and participation is required for all students enrolled in public school. The state assessments provide important feedback to families, teachers, administrators, and state policymakers as to where schools are succeeding and where schools and districts need to enhance their efforts. Legislators and taxpayers also expect an objective assessment of student and school performance in return for a very significant investment of public funds. In those districts that have chosen to give the PARCC assessment, having all students participate will allow the state to better evaluate the quality of the test.

Nevertheless, ESE knows there will be isolated instances of a student's refusal to take the test, either of his/her own volition or at the direction of a parent. In these cases, we ask principals to encourage parents to rethink their refusal and remind them that students' and teachers' experiences will help the state decide whether PARCC is a worthwhile assessment. When a parent directs their child to refuse to take PARCC, they are forgoing their child's opportunity to

contribute to ESE's evaluation of the test. We ask principals and test proctors to handle refusals with sensitivity. Students should not be pressured to take the test, nor should they be punished for not taking the test. They may sit quietly and read in the testing room, but if they are distracting others in the class who are taking the test, it would be appropriate to have them move to another location in the school with adult supervision. There is no requirement to provide formal or informal instruction to these students during the test period; having them do homework or read a book is sufficient.

For students who refuse to take the MCAS or PARCC paper tests, no special reporting is needed. If no answer form is submitted for a student, or if a blank answer form is submitted, the student will automatically be considered absent. For students who refuse to take the PARCC online test, the test administrator will need to mark the student's test as "complete" in the PearsonAccess<sup>next</sup> system so that the test session can be closed. Completed online tests with no responses will also default to absent.