



PARCC Opt Out? – Parents' Concerns/State's Dilemma

In a recent open letter to parents and guardians, interim superintendent Dr. Leroy Seitz addresses the issue of students' attendance at the PARCC examination. Citing NJ State Administrative Code which concerns Standards and Assessments states, Dr. Seitz reminds us that "all students at grade levels three through 12, and at any other grade(s) designated by the Commissioner pursuant shall take all appropriate statewide assessments as scheduled." He added that "If your son or daughter indeed misses each opportunity for the assessment (and the make-up examination date), he or she will be marked absent in accordance with the District's Attendance Policy. Further, the testing coordinator at his or her school will be directed to follow the instructions from the State in terms of how to handle the coding of the assessments." Dr. Seitz is "confident that our District and our students are ready for this new assessment" and the district has "the technology necessary to implement the exam." According to the interim superintendent "our students are educationally prepared" and "the curriculum that they are taught everyday aligns with the Common Core State Standards." Parents are encouraged "to learn as much as you can about the PARCC examination by visiting the NJ Department of Education's [website](#)."

Last month a series of public hearings were held about the PARCC exams. These hearings followed the release of an Interim Report of the Study Commission on the Use of Student Assessments, which was mandated via an Executive Order last July. According to the report, the "stated charge to the Study Commission was to review and make recommendations to the Governor regarding the quality and effectiveness of student assessments administered to K-12 students in New Jersey. In particular, the Study Commission was charged to consider and make recommendations on the volume, frequency, and impact of student assessments occurring throughout New Jersey school districts, as well as on the Core Curriculum Content Standards, including the Common Core State Standards." The following are the initial recommendations of the commission:

1. Clear and effective communication of State and NJDOE vision for educational improvement and how student assessments should be used to accomplish the vision.
2. School district should establish comprehensive vision for testing and how each test relates to an important learning or strategic objective
3. For better understanding of student assessments, the State and NJDOE should conduct a carefully designed study to learn more about a number of issues, including, but not limited to: which assessments are being used locally, what purposes they serve, how much time students and staff spend preparing for and implementing the assessments, how State-required assessments are scheduled, and what impact the testing schedule has on instructional and student learning time.
4. Each school district should conduct a thorough inventory and analysis of its local assessment system: (a) to determine which tests and assessments are being administered to students; (b) to determine the minimum testing necessary to serve diagnostic, instructional, and accountability purposes; (c) to ensure every test and assessment is of high quality; (d) to ensure every test and assessment is providing the information needed for specific school district and school purposes; and (e) to ensure every test and assessment is supported by structures and routines so that assessment results are effectively used to improve student learning.
5. Consistent with the vision, mission, goals, and objectives of the school district and in order to maximize transparency in testing, each school should engage its parents and community members at least annually in a conversation about the school district's plan for student assessment, including which tests and assessment instruments are administered to their children at the school district, school, and classroom levels; what purposes they will serve; how often they will be administered; and how much time the implementation of the instruments (including practice time) will be expended.

Dr. Seitz's open letter acknowledges the growing angst of parents' concerns about the PARCC tests and the emerging statewide movement of opting out of the 'new concept' of testing. Hence, the interim superintendent states that "the Franklin Township Public School District understands and respects the views of our parents/guardians. However, a public school district in New Jersey is not officially sanctioned to implement an "opt out" procedure for State assessments.

Despite the statement of Dr. Seitz, the New Jersey Education Association (NJEA) asserts that parents have the right to have their children refuse to take the state tests. However, according to the transcript of an interview with NJ Spotlight, "when asked specifically whether the union would support children opting out, [Wendell Steinhauer, president of the NJEA] repeated: "At the end of the day, it is the parents' prerogative to choose what is best for their child." He added that "NJEA supports the parents' rights to make the decision for their children about the test and get the best education for their children."

Last month the NJEA, which represents a vast majority of the state's 200,000 teachers, published the results of a survey titled 'Attitudes of Parents and the Public Toward High-Stakes Standardized Testing.' The 1,000 respondents included likely voters and public school parents. Surprisingly, a majority (56%) of the parent respondents had very little knowledge about PARCC; however, not so surprisingly, the poll responses positively correlated to questions focusing on the criticisms of PARCC rather than the purported benefits. Some noteworthy statistics of parents responding to the poll are:

- 90% have a favorable view of public school teachers
- 81% believed that teachers are forced to teach to the test
- 78% says that tests caused stress for students
- 80% said that the PARCC takes away from valuable instructional time
- 71% favor reducing the use of standardized test; the same amount says that there is too much emphasis on standardizes tests
- 66% want the right of refusal ['opt out'] so that their children would not have to take the PARCC exam
- 74% want to delay for two years any decisions based on PARCC tests until the results and impact of those tests have been studied.

As the opposition to the PARCC continues to grow, the NJDOE remains steadfast with preparations for full implementation of the tests in the coming weeks. Nevertheless, on January 28th State Assemblyman Patrick Diegnan, chairman of the Assembly's education committee, introduced a bill that will provide a process for students to sit out the upcoming PARCC exams, including a timeline for families to give a 14-day notice to their district. This bill and others like it could limit the scope of the PARCC exams and influence how they will be used. It is widely believed that the Diegnan 'opt-out' bill will set a precedence since it emboldens parent to protest the tests by having their children not take them. If this occurs, each district may be compelled to set their own [PARCC] policies.

REFERENCES:

- <http://www.state.nj.us/education/sca/parcc/>
- http://www.njea.org/njea-media/pdf/Webinar_PPT.pdf
- <http://www.nj.gov/education/code/current/title6a/chap8.pdf>
- <http://www.state.nj.us/education/studycommission/InterimReport.pdf>

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GUIDANCE DEPARTMENT

The following are recent announcements from the Guidance Department:

- The 2015 – 2016 course of Study is available at this [link](#). The Course of Study will assist FHS students in selecting courses for the 2015-2016 school year. Currently, students can request courses via Genesis, by clicking the 'Requests' tab under the 'Scheduling' tab of the parent portal.
- Students have the opportunity to sign up for free SAT Review sessions, which will be held at the public Library in March. For more information and to register, students should visit the Library's event's calendar online at www.franklintwp.org or call 732.873.8700.
- A list (see attachment) of College Open Houses includes colleges/universities in NJ, PA, DE, DC, MD, NY and VA. The open house allows students and parents to see many of the activities available on campus while the traditional college tour lets you experience the college in a more typical environment. Contact the college in advance to verify the date and time as some of these dates may change. Many schools request that you register before coming to an open house. If you do not see a college on the attached list that you are interested in, please call or visit the website of the college/university to schedule a visit. On the last page of the attachment is a list of National College Fairs happening in our area. Parents and students participating in National College Fairs meet one-on-one with representatives from colleges and universities to discuss admission and financial aid opportunities at their respective institutions. Be sure to register before the fair to make the most of your time onsite and to ensure that colleges can follow up with you.
- The Paul Robeson Institute for Ethics, Leadership and Social Justice at Raritan Valley Community College is pleased to announce the Twenty Fifth Annual Paul Robeson Youth Achievement Awards. The awards were established in 1990 to honor outstanding African American high school and middle school students. These students have excelled in the areas that Robeson gained prominence - Scholarship, the Arts, Community Services and Athletics. The Annual Awards are an opportunity for middle school and high school students to be applauded for their achievements. Interested applicants are strongly encouraged to apply provided that the student meets the following requirements:
 - Students must be Black/African American.
 - Students must have a 3.0 GPA or greater.
 - Students must attend school or live in Somerset and Hunterdon counties.

If you fit this criteria, please fill out the Student Application, [PR HS Youth Achievement Student Form 2014.docx](#), and return it to your School Counselor by February 20th 2015. If you have questions, please reach out to your School Counselor!

The Family Naviance link, <http://www.franklinboe.org/Page/8241>, provides more detailed and updated important information.

BOE Corner

At the January 22nd BOE action meeting Board president, Mr. Edward Potosnak III, continued the tradition of highlighting positive news about students and staff in his report under his "Focus on Franklin" section report. He also spoke about the recent BOE retreat and announced the Board Committee assignments. Unlike previous Board presidents, Mr. Potosnak assigned each of the nine Board officers to one of the districts' nine public schools. Mrs. Nancy LaCorte, Board vice-president, is the FHS' liaison; she will be invited to future PTSO meetings to listen to the concerns of our membership as well as provide us with pertinent Board related information that affect our students and staff.

The Board Committees, whose meetings are not open to the public and are held outside of the normal Board meetings, are responsible for driving the district's goals by developing specific objectives and tasks in their respective areas. The following are the Board Committee assignments for 2015:

Curriculum, Instruction & Assessment

Betty Whalen, Chair

Patricia Stanley

Latee Walton-McCleod

Personnel and Negotiations Committee

Christine Danielsen, Chair

Nancy LaCorte

Margaret Steele

Facilities/Technology/Transportation

Christine Danielsen, Chair

Nancy LaCorte

Margaret Steele

Policy Committee

Latee Walton-McCleod, Chair

Nancy LaCorte

Julia Presl

Finance Committee

Nancy LaCorte, Chair

Margaret Steele

Christine Danielsen

The Ad Hoc Committees and members are:

Communications & Public Engagement

Richard Arline, Chair

Patricia Stanley

Betty Whalen

School Safety and Security

Richard Arline, Chair

Julia Presley

Patricia Stanley

Personnel Changes – Appointment/Retirement:

The Board interviewed and appointed Ms. Ana Posada-Washington as the new Director of Planning/Research, Assessment and Accountability. Ms. Posada-Washington began her work in the District in 2008 as a Vice Principal at FHS, becoming the supervisor of World Languages K-12/District Testing Coordinator in February of 2013. Dr. Seitz said that "it is imperative that we have a qualified person to serve in this position on a permanent basis, especially with the upcoming PARCC assessment" about Ms. Posada-Washington's appointment. It was also announced the Ms. Eileen Brett, Principal of SGS, will be retiring effective August 2015.

Mark your Calendar – FEBRUARY/MARCH EVENTS

Feb 06	End of Second Marking Period
Feb 10	PTSO Meeting; Library @ 7:00 PM
Feb 12	Music Keyboard Festival @ 7:30 PM
Feb 16	No School; Presidents Day
Feb 19	BOE Meeting @ 7:30 PM; FMS Cafeteria
Feb 24	Special Parents Advisory Resource Committee; 7:00 PM
Feb 25	Report Card Distribution
Feb 26	BOE Meeting @ 7:30 PM; FMS Cafeteria
Mar 09	Minimum Session Day
Mar 19	Art Recognition Ceremony
Mar 19	BOE Meeting @ 7:30 PM; FMS Cafeteria
Mar 20-21	Spring Musical - Jekyll & Hyde
Mar 25-27	Parent Teacher Conferences – Minimum Session
Mar 26	BOE Meeting @ 7:30 PM; FMS Cafeteria
Mar 28-29	Spring Musical - Jekyll & Hyde