PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA
DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION | June St. Clair Atkinson, Ed.D., *State Superintendent*
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TO LEA Superintendents
Charter School Directors

FROM Rebecca B. Garland, Deputy State Superintendent
Office of the Deputy State Superintendent

DATE March 25, 2014

NORTH CAROLINA STANDARDIZED TESTING AND OPTING OUT

Each year the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) receives some letters or phone calls from concerned parents either requesting not to have their students tested or refusing to allow their students to test. Although we recognize these parents' concerns, to date the North Carolina State Board of Education (SBE) has not allowed any student to opt out of required State testing unless there were extenuating circumstances, primarily related to serious health conditions.

Because of state and federal law, all students in North Carolina (including students with disabilities) are required to participate in the testing program. State policy says "all eligible students in membership (i.e., enrolled in a school) at grades 3 through 8 and 10 and in high school courses in which an end-of-course (EOC) assessment is administered shall participate in the state assessment program adopted by the SBE" (GCS-C-021). In addition, our end-of-grade (EOG) assessments of reading and mathematics at grades 3–8 and science at grades 5 and 8 and the end-of-course assessments of English II, Math I, and Biology are required by *No Child Left Behind* for federal reporting. The North Carolina Final Exams were developed in response to the SBE's summer 2011 vote requiring an annual evaluation for every teacher in North Carolina. Per GCS-A-016, this annual evaluation is required of all North Carolina school districts and select charter schools, who accepted funding through the Race to the Top federal grant and as a condition of an *Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver.* All eligible students are required to participate in the administration of the state-designated assessments for use in the North Carolina teacher evaluation process.

SBE Policy GCS-A-010 requires that all schools involved in the state testing program "establish any needed school policies and procedures to assure all eligible students are tested fairly." Additionally, state policy requires that some test scores be used as a portion of the student's final grade in a course. GCS-C-003 specifies that schools will use EOC assessments as "at least twenty percent (20%) of the student's final grade for each respective course with the exception of students following the Occupational Course of Study." GCS-A-016 states that schools are to use results from all course-specific operational assessments used for the North Carolina Teacher Evaluation process as a minimum of twenty percent (20%) of the student's final grade for each respective course.

As in prior years, because of state and federal policy that does not allow students to opt out of testing, if a student is present in the classroom on test day, employees of the LEA must administer tests to students who are required or permitted to participate (GCS-A-001). Students are to be given an answer sheet. The answer sheet will be pre-slugged with the student's name and therefore scanned. If nothing is answered, the student will receive the lowest possible score (Level I). The computer will not recognize that the student intentionally opted out and will scan for right answers. Schools do not have the option to remove the answer sheet from the class package. A student's grade for the course and overall grade point average calculation may be negatively impacted by receiving the lowest score.

Please share this information with your principals and teachers. Parents who request not to have their students tested or refuse to allow their students to test must be informed of state and federal testing requirements and understand the possible academic outcomes for not permitting their students to test. The policy of the Board is that all students in the state shall participate in the testing program, and as a result, our schools must try to follow Board policy. Our State Board takes these mandates very seriously and adheres to state and federal guidelines that address the needs of all children.

If you have questions or need further clarification regarding information within this memo, please contact your Regional Accountability Coordinator.

RBG/whw

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