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## BUFFALO PUBLIC SCHOOLS

### Office of the Superintendent

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Dear Parents/Guardians,

We wanted to take a moment to share important new information with you that was recently released from the New York State Education Department (NYSED) relevant to grades 3-8 assessments. As you may be aware, NYSED Commissioner Mary Ellen Elia has been committed to collecting significant feedback from students, parents and educators throughout our state. Several key changes have been made to the design and administration of assessments at the Elementary and Middle school levels. These changes are intended to improve the testing experience for students as well as the validity of the assessments.

Please know that we fully support the administration of the assessments and invite all our families to participate this spring. While there have been concerns about the tests, they do provide valuable information for teachers and parents about the progress children are making. The results assist us in evaluating our curriculum and prioritizing and maximizing our existing resources, including reading and mathematics support. Teachers and principals use the test results to plan instruction for the following school year. The tests also help make sure that no children – especially those most at risk – are slipping through the cracks.

The New York State Education Department has made significant changes to the 2016 Grades 3-8 ELA and Mathematics Assessments. These shifts are listed below:

- **A decrease in the number of test questions:** In response to recommendations, the length of the ELA and math tests have been reduced for all grade levels so students could demonstrate their knowledge and thoughtfully respond to questions.
- **A shift to untimed tests:** This change will also provide students further opportunity to demonstrate what they know and can do by allowing them to work at their own pace.
- **The Grades 3-8 ELA and mathematics assessments will not be used to evaluate teachers and principals during the next four years (2015-2016 through and including 2018-2019).**
- **Greater involvement of educators in the test development process:** The tests have been thoroughly reviewed by New York State educators to ensure they measure what students are learning in their classrooms. In response to concerns about the tests not covering the material that students are learning, the State Education Department brought teachers and other educators to Albany to review all items on the 2016 tests. Each item has now been reviewed by at least 22 educators.

*“Putting children and families first to ensure high academic achievement for all.”*

We realize that some parents are making the decision on behalf of their children to refuse participation in New York State Assessments. Several schools in Buffalo (City Honors School #195, Frederick Law Olmsted School #156, and Leonardo DaVinci High School #212) use state assessments as one of multiple sources of information to determine admissions into schools. Those schools will be unable to assign a value to a portion of the student admissions profile if a student refuses to complete the most recent state assessments administered at the time of application.

Pursuant to New York State guidelines, school districts may not solely or primarily rely upon, but may include state assessments as one of multiple measures used to determine competitive admissions into schools. If a state assessment score does not exist for a student, the lack of this assigned value, while not disqualifying the student, will impact the student's admissions ranking.

This year's assessments will be administered on the following dates:

<b>English Language Arts (Grades 3-8)</b>	<b>April 5, 6, 7</b>
<b>Mathematics – (Grades 3-8)</b>	<b>April 13, 14, 15</b>

We ask that any parent/guardian who decides that they do not want their children to participate in the assessments send a written note or email to your child's teacher or principal notifying them of your intentions. Students with notes on file prior to the start of the assessment will not be given an examination booklet and will be allowed to read quietly while the test is being administered. Any student without a written note on file will be given a test booklet.

If you have any further questions, please contact your respective building principal.

Sincerely



Dr. Krimer Cash  
Superintendent