

VOORHEESVILLE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT

VOORHEESVILLE, NEW YORK 12186



February 23, 2016

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Dear Parents and Guardians,

I am writing to ask for your support to have all of our students take the New York State Assessments. School districts are required to administer tests in grades 3-8 and in high school according to both New York State and Federal laws. New York State law requires that the NYS 3-8 tests can have no negative consequences for students. Recent regulations issued by the New York State Education Department ensure that the 3-8 tests will not be used in teacher evaluations for the next four years. The State Education Department has stated that the grades 3-8 tests will be shortened, and that students will be given as much time as they need to take the tests, beginning with this school year. However, one thing that has not changed is that both the state and federal education departments have made it clear that test results will continue to be used for school and district accountability measures. Federal education law establishes a minimum 95% student participation rate for state tests for schools to be able to demonstrate adequate yearly progress.

There are potentially significant consequences for schools that do not meet the 95% student participation rate for state tests. According to a letter dated October 19, 2015 from Monique Chism, a Director in the U.S. Department of Education, to NYS Commissioner of Education MaryEllen Elia, consequences for schools could include loss of Federal funding, lowering the school's accountability rating, requiring the school to develop plans to increase student participation in state testing, and requiring a school and/or a district to "implement additional interventions aligned with the reason for inadequate student participation, even if the State's accountability system does not officially designate schools for such interventions" (letter of Monique Chism to MaryEllen Elia, October 19, 2015). This letter will be posted to our district website for your reference.

I am sure you are aware of all of the controversies regarding NYS testing. There are legitimate concerns regarding the tests and how they have been used in the past several years. It is certainly the right of parents, guardians, and citizens to speak out against policies they find objectionable. We will make every effort to minimize the stress and anxiety for our students related to NYS testing. I also want to let you know that if you make the decision to refuse the tests for your children, our schools and our district will respect your decision. I am writing to you regarding this issue because I am concerned that there may be negative consequences for our schools and our school district if we fall below the mandated participation rate.

Thank you for your consideration, and please contact me if you wish to discuss this matter with me.

Sincerely,

Brian Hunt