Dear Parents/Guardians,

As you may be aware through the influx of media coverage on this topic, the Pennsylvania Department of Education indicated a marked decrease in the number of students passing the Pennsylvania System of Student Assessment (PSSA test). The test changed to reflect assessment of the new academic standards implemented in 2013 (PA’s version of the Common Core). Secretary of Education, Pedro Rivera, released the following letter to school officials on this topic. Please click here to read the letter from the Pennsylvania Secretary of Education.

Typically scores initially drop when an assessment is changed, but this year the state reports that the scores are extremely low, especially in math. For example, the state reports that only 30% of 8th grade students are proficient in math as compared to 74% last year. This may be due to heightened standards as some material is being tested a full grade level earlier than the previous Academic Content Standards, coupled with the expectation for districts to develop and implement new curriculum within a very limited timeframe.

We recently received our preliminary data for the Marple Newtown School District. Though the official data may vary slightly, our calculations of the preliminary data appear to be consistent with the reduction in percentages of proficiency experienced by districts across the state. It is important to remember that MNSD students haven’t changed; the assessment has changed. By example, when comparing the same cohort of students (3rd to 4th grade), ELA proficiency changed from 88.6% proficiency in 2013-14 (as a 3rd grader) to 78.0% proficiency in 2014-15 (as a 4th grader) and math proficiency changed from 93.4% to 66.4% from grade 3 to grade 4. In other words, a child who was proficient as a 3rd grader may not be proficient on this new assessment as a 4th grader. In short, this year’s test is the same as last year’s test in name only.

The Pennsylvania Department of Education communicated that districts will be receiving Individual Student Reports (ISRs) by September 14 for the distribution of the 2015 PSSA results to parents and guardians. As soon as the ISRs and our official district data become available, we will communicate additional information with our parents and stakeholders as appropriate.

I thank you for your support as we transition through this change together.

Sincerely,

Dr. Carol Cary

Carol A. Cary, Ed. D.
Superintendent