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Dear Parents,

This week, children in grades 3 through 8 will begin taking their New York State assessment exams for English Language Arts and mathematics. The tests are an important snapshot of student achievement, which can make “testing weeks” stressful for students, families, teachers and school staffs.

This year, we are administering new state tests, which align with the more rigorous academic standards of the Common Core. Before I explain a bit more about the Common Core and the new exams, I offer some simple advice for you to convey to your children.

**Relax. Rest. Then, do your best.** A little stress is normal, and can even be educational—caring about doing a good job helps any of us to perform better. However, your children should not worry about trying to achieve a particular score. All that families and teachers should want is for our students to try hard and do their best work.

These are not simply comforting words. They offer very practical advice for everyone involved in administering and taking the tests. I am attaching to this email a couple of documents that will help to explain why.

One is an overview of the Common Core curriculum. New York is one of 45 states to adopt the Common Core, which sets clear standards to keep students on track for success in today’s economy. Almost everyone involved in education agrees that the Common Core is a major improvement over the previous patchwork of standards, which varied from school to school and state to state, with generally lower expectations for urban students.

Rochester schools will implement the Common Core curriculum at every grade level in the 2013-14 school year, with new course schedules that provide more instructional time. This leads to an obvious question: How can it be fair to test children on material that they haven’t been taught yet?

There are several facts you should know.

- **All year long, your children have been learning Common Core skills and content.** Though the new tests are more difficult than past ELA and math exams, the format and content will be similar to work your children are already doing. We have known these

assessments were coming since 2010. All of our principals and hundreds of teachers have received in-depth training on the new standards, and our elementary schools have been working hard all year to help students meet them.

- **Students do not need to “cram” content to do well on the test.** The Common Core is designed to develop learning skills—such as reading carefully for information and using math in real-world situation. The standards teach children to apply knowledge instead of repeating facts. Students have been working on these skills all year, so it is more important to feel rested and ready than to study hard.
- **This is a baseline assessment to guide future instruction.** It would be unfair to judge students, teachers, or schools as a success or failure based on the results of these tests. But the New York State Education Department has said repeatedly that these tests are a starting point. The scores are a tool we will use to help your children meet the new standards and succeed in school.

For all of these reasons, I must request and require every eligible child to take the ELA and math assessments beginning this week. I am enclosing a table below with the testing dates and time allotments—daily schedules will vary in different schools.

I must also caution that, despite what you may have heard, opting out is not permitted under New York State law or Education Department regulations. Our schools will not provide alternative activities for students who don’t take the tests, and absences will not be excused for children who miss the tests without a valid reason.

A second attachment provides some additional advice about preparing your children for the exams. I hope they are able to do their best with a minimum of stress, and I look forward to seeing more students achieve and succeed as we implement the Common Core curriculum.

Sincerely,



Bolgen

English Language Arts Tests	Mathematics Tests
<p><b>Tuesday, April 16 through Thursday, April 18</b> [Make-up dates: 4/19, 4/22, 4/23]</p> <p><b>Grades 3 and 4:</b> Scheduled time/day: 70 minutes Estimated time required/day: 50 minutes Total estimated testing time: 150 minutes</p> <p><b>Grades 5-8:</b> Scheduled time/day: 90 minutes Est. time required: 70 mins (days 1-2);50 mins (day 3) Total estimated testing time: 190 minutes</p>	<p><b>Wednesday, April 24 through Friday, April 26</b> [Make-up dates: 4/29, 4/30, 5/1]</p> <p><b>Grade 3:</b> Scheduled time/day: 70 minutes Estimated time required/day: 50 minutes Total estimated testing time: 150 minutes</p> <p><b>Grades 4-8:</b> Scheduled time/day: 90 minutes Est. time required: 50 mins (days 1-2);70 mins (day 3) Total estimated testing time: 170 minutes</p>