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Subject: ISAT opt out

I wanted to reach out on the opt out issue because I'm concerned that there are repercussions from the State that teachers and parents may not be aware of. We've just sent something to principals and I want to make sure you guys are clear too.

What we've heard from ISBE is that because ISAT is required by both federal (NCLB) and state law (IL School Code), it's possible that schools could lose federal funding with low testing percentages. We're still trying to nail down with ISBE exactly how this will be determined, but this is something that would be reviewed by the federal Dept. of Ed.

In addition, there are possible repercussions for teachers from ISBE, again since this is a required test. Depending on the circumstance, teacher actions could be reviewed by the State Certification Board with potential impact on their licensing. There would of course also be CPS-specific consequences since test administration and a maintaining secure testing environment are considered basic job functions of CPS employees.

Finally, the state has also indicated that this could trigger a review of school recognition status (i.e. accreditation).

And as for the messaging around this, I think there are also a few things that need to be cleared up.

- Time spent testing:** I think it's misleading to say that ISAT takes up 2 weeks of instructional time. The total test time is 3 hours each for reading and math and 2 for science (4 an 7 only). You can find this in the test manual [here](#) and [here](#), on page 6. There is a 2 week window to allow maximum flexibility in scheduling. Students who are absent typically take make-up tests in the 2nd week, but this doesn't disrupt instruction of other students as it is done in another setting. The 6 or 8 hours on the test is less than 1% of a student's time spent in school.

- CPS does not pay for ISAT.** I saw a flyer that quoted us as spending 3.5 million on it. I have no idea where this came from...this is a state exam.

- Although it isn't used for accountability or promotion/selective enrollment, it isn't a complete waste of time. It is the only measure we have this year aligned to the full depth and breadth of the Common Core and the only uniform measure across the state. While NWEA is aligned to the CCSS in terms of strand alignment, text and item complexity, it is of course only available in multiple choice. ISAT also includes extended response items aligned to the CCSS.

There is no evidence that the federal government will limit Title I funding due to testing opt outs. If ISBE or US Ed has evidence of this ever happening anywhere or under consideration, please have them produce it. We have reviewed the US Code and the CFR and found no references to automatic funding cuts for failure to make AYP. Below 95% participation averaged over three years would trigger an AYP failure, but the district has not made AYP since at least 2005, and only 64 CPS schools made AYP last year. If there were any cuts, they happened already.

CTU is fully prepared to defend teachers who refuse to administer this test. Teachers who have chosen not to administer the test understand that there may be repercussions for their jobs. Please provide a citation for the impact of test boycotts on licensure.

If past failure to make AYP did not already trigger this, why would presently missing it, as nearly all schools will do with 100% meets and exceeds required, trigger heretofore unknown sanctions.

Disruption is far more than the 6-8 hours of testing. Even students not in 3-8th grade have disrupted schedules during the testing window; most specials are cancelled etc. At least one school is being dismissed early (before 12) for the three days of testing. Special ed students can take many more than 6-8 hours to test, and their teachers are lost to administering the test for weeks. This doesn't even begin to cover the hours and dollars devoted to ISAT prep time.

This claim is not coming from us; nonetheless, the ISAT will cost the state \$18M; \$3.5M of that is for the test within CPS.

The ISAT will still be primarily multiple choice; the number of extended responses items is the same as prior years. The PARCC blueprints and test specifications call for more complex multiple choice and more extended response items. The newly required CCQB performances tasks are giving students plenty of practice in ELA and math in a non-multiple choice format. Furthermore, the equating procedures for last year's ISAT to this year's ISAT are unclear. If the CC switch is meaningful, the underlying construct of the test has changed; you cannot compare last year's scores to this year's without heavy equating. At best, reading will have 10 anchoring items. Math is less clear but will have to be worse.

- Because Illinois requires ISAT, schools are expected to present all students with the test. Students can refuse to test, but must remain quiet and not disrupt testing for other students.

I definitely understand the frustration with time spent on assessment generally and unhealthy testing practices (bubble kids strategy, narrowly focusing on certain skills...etc). Believe me, we are working to change this. We have sent out messages and talked with principals and Chiefs about what it means to prepare students to do well on assessments that are aligned to the Common Core. While you guys may be hearing about the bad practices, there are also plenty of principals and teachers that are getting the message about how high quality daily tasks that truly ask kids to think, write, defend their choices...etc are the key. This is a process that will certainly take time, but we're committed to it.

At the same time, I hope that MTAS and the other groups you guys work with can deliver a message that fully informs parents of the facts about ISAT (and other tests) and any potential repercussions. As you know, I'm always more than willing to talk to you guys and help clear things up.

Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks,
Didi

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Barbara Byrd-Bennett sent a letter to parents stating that they have the right to opt their children out of all tests. We are instructing parents to tell schools they are refusing on behalf of their legally minor children and that the school should code their student as having refused the test. It is unethical to pressure children, some as young as eight years old, to participate in activities against their parent/guardian's wishes.

Most of us are not just hearing about bad practices; our children and, in some cases, students are in Chicago Public Schools experiencing the effects of the CPS testing policy every day.

We encourage you to continue to work to change the fundamental values in this district that continue to prioritize test scores above education and children.

We encourage CPS administration to do the same.