

Lower Merion

301 East Montgomery Ave.



School District

Ardmore, PA 19003-3399

March 13, 2018

Dear Lower Merion School District Families:

As the PSSA and Keystone exam window is quickly approaching, we would like to provide context for our school community about some immediate implications regarding state testing.

The 2017-2018 school year is the first year of implementation of the *Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA)*. In December of 2015, the *Every Student Succeeds Act* was passed with bipartisan support, replacing *No Child Left Behind (NCLB)* as the nation's main education law. As a part of ESSA, each state is required to submit a plan to the United States Department of Education (USDE). Pennsylvania's proposed Consolidated State Plan was submitted to the USDE in September 2017 and was approved in January of 2018. The [Pennsylvania's ESSA Consolidated State Plan](#) is available for review in English and Spanish.

As a notable change for 2017-2018, a strong emphasis has been placed on student participation in state assessments. While participation has always been an expectation, **schools are now required to have 95% of their eligible students participate in the PSSA and/or Keystone Exams**. Non-participants include any student not sitting for the exam for any reason (absenteeism, no attempt by student, parent refusal, or Chapter 4 opt-out for religious objection). New this year, if a school's participation rate is below the 95% requirement, the school's publicly reported proficiency rate will be negatively impacted.

What does this mean for us as a district? If the total number of non-participants is below 5%, there is no impact. **If, however, the number of non-participants exceeds 5%, then every child above the 5% threshold contributes to decreasing the school's proficiency rate.** This only impacts the school, not the individual student.

Example:

A hypothetical middle school has 1000 students. 850 students participate in the PSSA exam. 750 students score in the proficient or advanced categories.

School Proficiency Rate (calculated in 2017 or earlier):

*750 students proficient ÷ 850 participants = **88% proficiency rate***

School Proficiency Rate (calculated in 2018):

*750 students proficient ÷ 950 (95% of total population) = **79% proficiency rate***

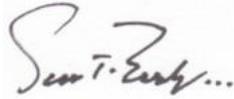
Lower Merion School District will be one of a very small number of school districts in Pennsylvania who will be negatively impacted by this legislative change. Lower Merion has had a high number of families who have exercised their Chapter 4 right to religiously object to PSSA exam participation. If our 2017 participation rates, which were roughly 85% and varied by exam, were to be mirrored in 2018, publicly reported proficiency rates at all schools would drop by approximately 10%, with some schools in certain tested areas falling as much as 17%.

As a school district, we object to this legislative change. To be clear, the state has provided an avenue for families to opt-out of PSSA participation via Chapter 4, and we, as a school district, fully support a family's right to do so. Under no circumstances will the district allow individual students to be negatively impacted by exercising their right to opt-out. Students will not be recommended for programming or scheduled into support classes based on non-participation.

We stand by our use of the testing data that we have, both individual and systemic. We use standardized testing data (PSSA, Keystone, AP, IB) to make informed decisions on our curriculum, programming, and supports for individual students. There are benefits to students who have established a testing history, particularly growth and projection data.

While we disagree with this new participation expectation for students and schools, we feel it is important that our families are equipped with the most up-to-date information in order to make informed decisions for their children as we approach the upcoming state assessments.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Scott T. Eveslage...".

Scott T. Eveslage, Ed.D.
Assistant Superintendent