

Oneonta City School District

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Tom Brindley
Superintendent

March 4, 2020

Dear Oneonta City School District Parents and Guardians:

In March and April, we will administer the Grades 3-8 English Language Arts and Mathematics New York State Exams. I recognize that the administration of these tests often do result in a degree of anxiety for our students. That is why we are working to employ a truly relaxed approach to these tests and consider these test days as simply just another day at school. Do these tests help us serve our students better? Sure, however, they provide for us only a fraction of the things that inform our instruction. I am proud to serve this district and have been doing so since I began twenty years ago. I serve among those who truly understand that we don't teach content – we teach kids. It is our teachers and all of our staff forging positive relationships with our students that truly inform our instruction. I say it over and over again, but kids don't care about what you have to teach them until they know that you care about them. I am surrounded by those who employ that approach to instruction on a daily basis. We will teach KIDS in this school district. Embedded in that caring and compassionate approach to teaching will be the skills necessary to help ensure that students are on track to graduate from high school with the critical thinking, problem solving, and reasoning skills needed for success in college, the military, workplace, and life in general.

For many years, we have all heard that when students opt out of the State exams there are no consequences placed upon the school or school district. In many dialogues, this is still a position that is proposed. However we may feel about these tests, please know that there IS now a consequence that the State imposes on the school when less than 95% of its students take these tests. The rules have changed and the methodology used by New York State for identifying low performing schools WILL penalize schools with high opt-out rates.

All school districts are now being required to submit reports outlining the participation rates for all subgroups of students in all of our district schools on the district report card. Districts whose participation rates do not elevate to the levels stipulated by the State will be required to submit corrective action plans that will carry assorted consequences over time including being labeled as Comprehensive Support and Improvement Schools or Targeted Support and Improvement Schools. If we are labeled as such due to certain performance markers, then we need to figure out how to better serve our students. However, being labeled as such because many of our students are opted out of these tests seems unreasonable and something that can easily be avoided by having all of our students participate. This is my plea to you. What I will do as this district's Superintendent and have done when serving as the Oneonta High School principal is shield this district, to the upmost of my ability, from the unreasonable burden of field testing which does nothing more than steal valuable classroom time away from meaningful instruction.

Please collaborate with us. I am not writing and including a list of things that we can do to help prepare our students for these test dates. In fact, just the opposite. Please let the night before and the morning before these tests be like any other night or morning before heading off to school as this is the way this school district is going to approach these tests.

Please know that wherever you land on this issue, I/we understand and appreciate your position. However, I wanted to write and share where I/we stand on these tests in the hopes that you may share the same approach and therefore allow your child/children to participate in taking them.

Sincerely,

Thomas F. Brindley
Superintendent of Schools