

March 1, 2016

Dear Parents/Guardians of Oneida City School District Children,

With the coming of this year's grades 3-8 State testing dates, we have some information and comments to share with you. First, we understand many of the frustrations that you are experiencing related to recent changes in your child's education. We are experiencing some of the same frustrations, as well as anxiety, related to changes in education that are some of the most significant we have seen in decades. Ultimately, our goals for the children of our community are aligned – to help them to succeed in school, enjoy their time while there and to be successful in life beyond school. The reality is, testing occurs throughout life and plays a major role in determining the success and failure of individuals. Our goal as a district is to create opportunities for current and future success, including navigating the many challenges that they will face along the way.

Below are some questions that we frequently hear from parents and community members with brief responses as well as links to additional information. We are providing this to allow you to make the most informed decisions possible. We greatly value your continued support and will provide answers to any additional questions that you may have. Please feel free to contact myself, Mr. Kavanagh or your children's teachers or principal.

Why are my children required to take the NYSED 3-8 Assessments in ELA/Math/Science?

These assessments are part of the No Child Left Behind legislation from President Bush's administration and reauthorized by the Every Student Succeeds Act passed in December, 2015. You can see the differences between the two laws here at www.ed.gov/essa.

Does my child have to sit for these assessments?

There is no provision in NYS law or NYSED regulation that allows parents to "opt their children out of" these assessments. That being said, the Oneida CSD will not force students to take these assessments. If a parent chooses to write a note excusing their children from these assessments these children will be moved to a separate location during the testing times to quietly read a book or finish homework.

Will teachers be allowed to provide instruction during this time?

No. School Districts are prohibited from offering instruction for these classes during the testing times.

Will the scores from these assessments be used for my child's teacher's evaluation?

No. There is a four year period of time where NYSED will be looking at finding alternative means for gathering scores for teachers' evaluations. The Common Core Task Force set up by Governor Cuomo recommended the suspension of this practice for four years while the Common Core Curriculum is reevaluated. You can read all of their recommendations here at: <http://goo.gl/cJlkh6>

Will the scores from these assessments be used by NYSED to determine if a school/district are in “good standing?”

Yes. The Federal Government and NYSED will still determine if the Oneida CSD is following all of their guidelines. Our schools have already begun to feel the effects of students not participating in these assessments. Otto Shortell M.S. is currently designated as a school on a Local Assistance Plan by NYSED for 8th Grade Science. This is the first step in a series of events that could, possibly, lead to this school being placed into “receivership status” by NYSED. This will mean the teachers, principal, Superintendent, and the Board of Education will have very little say in how the school is run. You can see the LAP/QIP at <http://goo.gl/lgtmrz>

Are there any other assessments my children take that the Oneida CSD uses to help determine a teacher’s evaluation score?

Yes. However, many of these assessments are used for a dual purpose. This means that the information we use for these assessments are used by us to gather information to inform our instructional program for your child, your child’s class, school, and district. Some of these assessments are: NYS Regents Exams, final examinations, screening assessments (AIMSweb), and locally generated assessments used by teachers, principals, and Mr. Kavanagh to help determine what is taught to your children.

Does my child have to take these assessments?

Yes. These assessments are part of the instructional program provided by the Oneida CSD. Not only are they required by New York State but the school district curriculum is guided by these results.

Is the Oneida City School District doing everything it can to ease the testing burden on its students?

Yes. The Oneida CSD is in compliance with all NYSED regulations limiting testing for teacher evaluations to less than 1% of the time a child is in school. Mr. Kavanagh is currently working with the Oneida Teacher’s Association and the Oneida Administrator’s Association to further reduce the amount of testing used for determining a teacher’s/principal’s evaluation score. We will have a new plan in place for the 2016-2017 school year. You can see what assessments are used for these purposes at <http://goo.gl/fqF4rj>

If you have questions about how our teachers and principals are being evaluated please do not hesitate to contact Mr. Kavanagh or myself at 363-2550. We will be happy to explain the process to you. Again, our goal is to provide the best education possible for your children and to partner with parents in accomplishing this.

Sincerely,

Ronald Spadafora Jr.
Superintendent of Schools