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Dear APS Parents and Guardians,

The foundation of our district's strategic plan, *APS 2020: Shaping the Future*, is our community's core beliefs. As we return from winter break and begin the second semester, I would like to reflect on some of these core beliefs:

- Families are our partners in education.
- Students, families, staff and community members share the responsibility for student achievement.
- Students take an active and ongoing responsibility for their learning.

These core beliefs highlight the importance of why our partnership with you is vital in achieving our community's vision that every student shapes a successful future. With this in mind, I would like to remind you that many of our students will participate in state testing this spring. Participation is important because results help students, parents and teachers understand whether students have mastered the content they need to know by the end of the school year to be on track for college and career success. We are asking for your help in preparing our students to do their very best on these upcoming assessments.

WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Summative Assessment

Beginning next week, all English Language Learner (ELL) students will take the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Summative Assessment. WIDA ACCESS measures a student's progress in acquiring academic English. The testing window for this exam runs January 9-February 10. Please note that there is no opt out option for these tests.

PARCC and CMAS Exams

Colorado's assessment system is called the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS). In 2009, Colorado implemented more rigorous academic standards known as the Colorado Academic Standards (CAS). The new standards set clear, consistent guidelines for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level. To accurately measure student mastery of these skills and expectations, Colorado adopted CMAS. The English language arts and math tests were developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). The testing windows for PARCC and CMAS begin in March and April.

- March 13-April 28
 - PARCC English language arts and math - Grades 3-9
- April 10-28
 - CMAS Social Studies – Some students in grades 4 and 7
 - CMAS Science - Grades 5, 8 and 11

PSAT

This year, our sophomores will take the Colorado PSAT and our juniors will take the Colorado SAT on April 11. College Board partners use information from these test scores to expand access to various scholarships. We encourage students and parents to explore an online help tool, Khan Academy, to prepare for these tests. Khan Academy gives students free personalized practice, including study and test-taking tips, six official full-length practice tests and a tailored practice plan. For more information, visit khanacademy.org.

Participation Guidelines

While we encourage participation from all students in the state assessments, state law allows parents to excuse their child from taking the tests. If a parent or guardian wants to excuse his or her child from participating, the parent/guardian must do so on behalf of the student.

On the back of this letter, you will find a FAQ that contains some useful information. I encourage you to read through it carefully. Thank you for your support in helping every APS student shape a successful future.

Rico Munn
Superintendent

Spring 2017 State Testing FAQ

Why are ELL students required to take the WIDA ACCESS for ELLs 2.0 Summative Assessment?

It is a state and federal requirement that all students meet English Language Proficiency standards. ELL students are required to take the WIDA ACCESS Assessment in order to measure their progress toward English proficiency. Please visit the Colorado Department of Education's website for more information:

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/coenglangprof/statestandards>

What process should parents follow if they choose to opt out their children from the PARCC, CMAS or PSAT exams?

State law allows parents to excuse their child from taking state assessments. Parents and guardians should contact the principal of their child's school to discuss the opt out process. Parents can then complete a form and return it to the school's principal.

What will students who are excused from the exams do at school while other students are testing?

Schools are not required to provide instruction for students whose parents have opted them out. Students may have to sit in the front office reading a book or use the library to work on homework.

Can my child make up the exam if they have to miss school on a testing day?

APS will have make-up test days for all of the assessments. Please check with your child's school for dates and times.

Why is it important for students to participate in state assessments?

While state assessments are only one measure of student learning, having all Colorado students take these exams provides teachers and parents with answers to important questions including:

- Is my child mastering more rigorous grade-level standards? (For reference, Colorado has a series of educational standards known as the Colorado Academic Standards. These standards have raised the bar for students in order to prepare them for college and careers.)
- How well is my child doing on meeting state standards compared to other students?
- Is my child gaining real-world skills like problem-solving and critical thinking?
- What information does my child's teacher need to know to improve classroom instruction?

How can I help my child do their best on state assessments?

Parents and guardians can work with their child's teacher to identify strategies to enrich their education where he or she is already meeting or exceeding grade-level expectations. Likewise, your child's teacher can help identify resources to improve his or her performance where needed. Tutoring, after-school programs or at-home activities may be needed to help students practice their skills. Other helpful tips to prepare for state assessments include:

- Make sure your child is well-rested.
- Provide your child with well-balanced and nutritious meals to help them focus and perform their best.
- Ensure your child arrives at school before the bell rings so that he or she feels more at ease as testing begins.
- Assure your child that test scores are only one indicator of academic progress. Highlight your child's great skills and talents.
- Determine which skills to reinforce at home. The detailed breakdowns of specific skills on your child's score report serve as a great starting point for identifying areas that need improvement.
- Access more information about the Colorado Academic Standards at [cde.state.co.us/communications/resourcesforparents](https://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/resourcesforparents)