March 2, 2015

Dear Principals,

We have received several inquiries from administrators regarding the policy and procedures for parents who want their children to refuse participation in state assessments. Please be advised that ISBE does not recognize a parent’s right to opt a child out of required student assessments, as there is no law in Illinois allowing this. While a parent cannot “opt a child out,” there may be students who refuse to participate in required state assessments.

It is unfortunate that ISBE’s limited guidance on this matter has placed the burden of refusing the test on students. I believe this is unfair to our students, families, principals and staff. However, we are obligated to follow ISBE’s limited direction to avoid sanctions that would have a devastating impact on our district.

ISBE made clear to CPS that failing to administer PARCC with fidelity to all required students puts district funding at risk. Districts and schools are required to test at least 95% of eligible students to ensure that test results for individual schools are representative of the school as a whole and not a small number of students. Failure to meet the 95% threshold puts schools and CPS at risk of financial sanctions. Please see ISBE’s threatened sanctions here.

This letter is meant to outline the direction ISBE has provided and hopefully provide clarity to principals about how to handle student refusal matters if they arise in your school.

1. **Test presentation protocol:** Per ISBE (see here), all schools are required to present PARCC testing materials to all eligible students and provide them the opportunity to test, for each unit. Copied below is language sent by ISBE’s Assessment Department in a March 2, 2015 email:

   **Presentation of the Test**
   Districts are required to present the test to every eligible student. The definition of this is as follows:

   - For paper-based testing, present the paper booklet to the student at their desk.
   - For computer-based testing, present the printed test ticket to the student at their testing device.
   - Each individual unit of the test must be presented to the student.

2. **Student refuses to test:** If the student refuses to engage in the test, Test Administrators may remove the test materials from the student’s testing space (either booklet or test ticket) and may allow the student to engage in a silent, student-guided instructional activity.

3. **Allowed activities:** Students may engage in personalized learning, silent reading, drawing, writing or other school work. NOTE: If the student remains in the testing environment with other students, this may not include school work in the subject that is currently being tested (i.e. a student cannot do math work while other students are testing on math).

4. **Managing large numbers of student refusals:** If a school anticipates large numbers of students will refuse to test, they may place these students in a large common area (e.g. cafeteria) during testing time, after following through with presentation of test materials. Students may then engage in silent, self-guided activities.

For questions regarding PARCC administration policy or logistics please contact your Network Chief or the Dept. of Student Assessment: 773-553-2430.
PARCC Facts

**Content**

- **PARCC is the truest measure of the Common Core that will be common across students in elementary and high school.** Tests like NWEA and EPAS only ask questions in a multiple choice format, which does not allow for students to show their writing, problem solving and research abilities. This helps answer the common complaint that many other assessments focus too much on filling in bubbles at the expense of applying deeper reading and math skills.

- PARCC will give us a clearer understanding of where teacher investments in learning about and designing instruction aligned to the Common Core standards are paying off and where we need to provide more support.

- Online administration includes interactive multimedia activities. **Instead of just reading passages, students will also watch videos, listen to speeches or review artwork, while learning about a topic.**

**Technology**

- Students also interact with math in new ways. **Instead of just picking an answer, students can use online tools to draw their answers, manipulate pictures and explain their thinking.**

- **PARCC uses less bandwidth than NWEA (50 KBPS compared to NWEA’s 250 KBPS),** which will reduce the chance of it overloading school systems. Schools still need to take care to not overload wireless access points if testing wirelessly.

**Accountability**

- **PARCC is not a high stakes assessment within CPS this year.** SQRP, principal and teacher evaluations use the same measures as in the prior year. This is a year to learn about PARCC and the Common Core, in a low-stakes environment, before PARCC is used for higher stakes.

- PARCC will not be used for accountability until we better understand how the test works, what it measures and what kind of data we get back from it. When it does become a part of our accountability landscape, **the focus will be on measuring growth.**

Sincerely,

Barbara Byrd-Bennett  
Chief Executive Officer  
Chicago Public Schools