


MEMORANDUM

December 18, 2015

TO: The Honorable Chair and Members of The School Board of Miami-Dade County, Florida

FROM: Alberto M. Carvalho, Superintendent of Schools 

SUBJECT: STAFF FOLLOW-UP: SCHOOL BOARD MEETING OF NOVEMBER 18, 2015, AGENDA ITEM H-9, COLLABORATION ON REDUCING MANDATED TESTING

At the School Board Meeting of November 18, 2015, the Board approved Agenda Item H-9, proffered by School Board Member Dr. Martin Karp. Agenda Item H-9 authorized the Superintendent to explore in a collaborative manner with Federal and State authorities for additional opportunities to reduce Federal and State mandated tests.

Miami-Dade County Public Schools (M-DCPS) fully supports a reduction in the number of standardized tests administered to students during the school year. In an effort to reduce unnecessary testing, M-DCPS announced in April 2015 that it was cutting the number of district-developed end-of-course (EOC) exams from 300 to 10 – including all elementary level EOC exams – in order to “restore valuable teaching and learning time.” The district’s elimination of most of its EOC exams followed the passage of a new state law in March 2015 that reduced the number of tests administered in Florida’s public schools, eliminated mandatory final exams for every class, and limited the time for testing to 45 hours per school year.

In addition to eliminating the majority of our EOC exams, M-DCPS announced in October 2014 that it was cancelling 24 tests that had been scheduled for administration during the 2014-2015 school year. The elimination of these 24 district-administered tests was based on the results of a review conducted by district staff that identified redundancy in state-required/endorsed exams administered within the district. This reduction in testing provided students with up to 260 extra minutes of instructional time, depending on the student’s grade level.

The Council of the Great City Schools recently published a report entitled *Student Testing in America’s Great City Schools: An Inventory and Preliminary Analysis*. The Council found that the average public school student takes about 112 tests between pre-K and grade 12, or about eight tests per year. The Council also found that in some cases, there is considerable redundancy in the state and local tests that are administered. In addition, the vast majority of assessments do not appear to be aligned with each other or with the new college- and career-ready standards. The Council’s report stated, “The result is a national educational assessment system that is incoherent and lacks any overarching strategy.”

The Council of the Great City Schools issued a series of recommendations for federal and state policymakers and district leaders. M-DCPS strongly supports the Council's recommendations. In particular, M-DCPS' educational leaders will engage in the following recommended activities:

- Regularly review the entire portfolio of state and locally administered tests in order to identify redundancies.
- Continue to scale back on assessments that do not meet professional standards, are not being used for the purposes for which they were designed, and do not present educators with a clear and coherent picture of students' performance.
- Review all tests to gauge whether they are aligned to state and district standards – and to each other.
- Investigate the use of assessments that can serve multiple purposes.

M-DCPS also supports the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), which was signed into law by President Barack Obama on December 10, 2015. According to the White House Press Office, the ESSA is designed to “preserve annual assessments and reduce the often onerous burden of unnecessary and ineffective testing on students and teachers, making sure that standardized tests don't crowd out teaching and learning, without sacrificing clear, annual information parents and educators need to make sure our children are learning.”

In conclusion, in an effort to reduce unnecessary and redundant testing, M-DCPS staff will continue to work with Federal and State authorities to review mandated assessments and determine if it is possible to make further reductions in the number of tests administered in the district.

If you have any questions, please contact Ms. Marie Izquierdo, Chief Academic Officer, Office of Academics and Transformation, at 305 995-1451, or Ms. Gisela Feild, Administrative Director, Assessment, Research, and Data Analysis, at 305 995-2943.

AMC:ig
M593

cc: School Board Attorney
Superintendent's Cabinet
Superintendent's Senior Staff