Dear Colleagues:

In August, scores from the 2015 3-8 English Language Arts (ELA) and Math Tests were released. Overall, students across the state made slight progress, thanks in large part to the efforts of you and your colleagues. [INSERT DISTRICT SPECIFIC INFORMATION]

However, as you are already aware, many students did not participate in the 2015 tests. As educators, we all have a responsibility to ensure that the greatest possible number of eligible students take the state assessments. This school year, our district plans to work with our school community to communicate the value and importance of the exams in order to encourage participation in the 2016 tests. I invite you to take part in these conversations.

While this has been a period of transition for all of us here in [DISTRICT], tests have always served an important role in educating our students. The annual tests are just one of many indicators of performance for students and educators, but they do provide an objective measurement of progress. They indicate how our students are performing in the classroom and where they need additional support. Without widespread participation in tests, we can’t accurately identify achievement gaps or make sure that all students receive the support they need to be successful. That is why it is crucial that we all work together to help parents and students understand why we test and encourage them to participate in this year’s annual exams.

Both the State and our district are committed to improving our testing program so that the annual assessments are as short as possible, while still providing valuable feedback to teachers and parents about student progress. State Education Commissioner MaryEllen Elia has prioritized improving New York’s testing program since coming on board this summer. In July, the commissioner announced a contract with a new test company, Questar Assessment. Under the new contract, nearly double the number of New York State teachers will be involved in developing future assessments. The new test vendor will also provide computer-based testing platforms that will eventually help reduce the need for stand-alone field tests and make test results available sooner.

The State has also taken steps to improve the 2016 tests. The ELA and math tests for all grades will be shorter. There will be fewer reading and writing passages on the ELA and a smaller number of multiple choice questions on the math.

In addition to working on improving the tests, the State is in the process of reviewing the current learning standards. An online survey has been launched, which allows respondents to provide feedback on any of the State’s standards for prekindergarten through grade 12. The survey is available at <http://www.nysed.gov/aimhighny>. Feedback from the survey will help inform any changes and adjustments to the standards. Therefore, educator input is critical to this effort. Please take the time to respond to the survey. You have until Monday, November 30, to do so.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out to your school administrators.

Thank you for your continued service to our students. I look forward to seeing the wonderful teaching and learning that will happen in our classrooms this year.

Together for students,

Superintendent