



March 2017

Dear New Lebanon Families:

This spring, our schools will administer the NYS Grades 3-8 assessments in English Language Arts (March 28-30) and Math (May 2-4).

We understand and respect the concerns some parents and guardians may have about testing. With those concerns in mind, I would like to explain how we use test results to improve education for your child.

The most important thing we want parents to know is that the state assessments provide us with important data that we use to improve education for all students. We view these tests as a measure of our performance, not your child's. For example, if we find that a grade is struggling with a math concept, we may enhance instruction in that area with new resources or with different instructional approaches.

Unfortunately, when fewer students take the exams we are left with an incomplete picture of how our students are learning. Fewer test scores limit our ability to address issues that would improve how we educate our students. This limit is a key reason why educational groups like the National PTA urge parents to allow students to take these assessments.

Our teachers, staff and administrators do everything we can to make students feel comfortable taking exams. As with any test, we ask our students to simply do their best. In response to parent and educator concerns, New York State made a number of changes to testing beginning in 2015. These include:

- **Fewer test questions:** Exams will be shorter with fewer questions in ELA and Math.
- **Untimed tests:** Students will have as much time as they need to finish exams at their own pace.
- **More teacher involvement:** The state has increased the number of teachers who create and review exams.
- **Results not tied to evaluations:** Exam results will not be used to evaluate teachers or principals. A moratorium is in place until 2019 while the state develops a new evaluation system.

I hope this information helps explain how we use the state's testing program to evaluate and measure student growth. While we will respect the wishes of any parent who requests that their child not take the exams, we believe participation helps improve our instructional program (while also complying with state and federal regulations).

If you have any questions at all, please contact me or your child's principal. We want to ensure that you have all the answers you need on this important issue. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Leslie Whitcomb, Superintendent