

Denver

School of the

Arts

DENVER PUBLIC SCHOOLS

Office of the Principal

7111 MONTVIEW BLVD
DENVER, COLORADO 80220

Phone (720) 424-1700

Fax (720) 424-1845

<http://dsa.dpsk12.org>



Dear DSA Parent/Guardians,

I would like to begin by thanking all you for your continued support of the staff and students at Denver School of the Arts! Thus far, we have truly had a great year with accolades and events, such as: being named a “High Performing- Blue School”, the Sponsorship of the National Arts Schools Network Conference and the performance of Carmina Burana, being named a “Distinguished” Arts School by the Arts Schools Network, the All-School Show and Gala, our students performing on the NPR Radio Show, “From the Top”, and our status as a school with Colorado School Grades. What a great year it has been.

We are truly blessed with great teachers and I am confident in their abilities and the responsibility placed before them to educate your children. I know there is great controversy related to the state mandated tests that we are obligated to administer to our students. As the Principal of DSA, I am confident that we are a staff dedicated to your children and their academic and personal growth. Truthfully, it has been a great year with the label of a “Blue School” and this rating has allowed our seniors to be able to submit college’s applications stating that they attend a **distinguished** school.

We are currently getting a wave of parent/guardians requesting to opt their child out of mandated state testing scheduled for this spring. In the past five years DSA has tested 100% of our students other than one year when a student withdrew from school during the testing window and this no-score counted against our school. This is a key contributor to our distinguished school status. Below you will find information that I would like to share with you about the importance of our state assessments.

The administration shares some of your same concerns. Superintendent Tom Boasberg has expressed his concerns publically to state and federal officials regarding the time spent on required assessments. In a recent interview, Boasberg said he is interested in removing the 12th grade assessment and reducing test time for state assessments to 3-4 hours annually. As an administration we also appreciate your concern for your child in regards to state testing. We believe that assessments provide valuable information for parents and students on where students stand on the mastery of the standards, and whether or not students are on track to graduate prepared for the 21st century. It is important for us to have data on each student to understand what is working and what is not working in terms of our curriculum, instruction, professional development and school leadership. This helps us ensure that every child receives an equitable education on the path to success.

That being said, I am responsible for sharing the state and federal laws behind state assessments to better understand why such tests are mandated. Both federal and state statutes are clear in their language — that all students enrolled in public schools must take the annual state assessments. Until such legislation changes, the Colorado Department of Education and each school district must comply with federal and state mandates. The U.S. Department of Education

has not exempted the State of Colorado from testing all students. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), which was amended by the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001, requires all states to implement “high-quality, yearly student academic assessments.” 20 U.S.C. § 6311(b) (3)(A). The statute further provides that “[s]uch assessments shall . . . provide for . . . the participation in such assessments of all students.” 20 U.S.C. § 6311(b)(3)(C) (emphasis added). Specifically, ESEA requires that all students enrolled in grades three to eight, and in one grade in any public high school, be assessed annually in English language arts and math. The law does not allow parents to exempt their children from taking the state assessments.

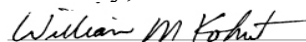
Per Colorado law [22-7-409 (1.2)(d)(A)], as part of the school and district accountability system, every student enrolled in a public school is required to take CMAS. The law is silent on the issue of opt-out options for parents and students. Some have claimed that the state law [22-1-123 (5) (a)] provides parents an opt-out option because it states, “Schools (etc.)...shall obtain the written consent of a student’s parent or legal guardian prior to the student being given any survey, analysis, or evaluation...” However, this law only pertains to certain types of sensitive, personal student information. Moreover, as of 2012, the statute explicitly excludes state assessments: “except that the requirement of written consent does not apply to a student’s participation in an assessment administered pursuant to section 22-7-407...”

Recent news articles through print, television, and social media make the point that testing is optional and families should take advantage of this right. A few Denver-metro school districts have taken a similar stand on this matter. Due to the demographics of our school and the communities our population draws from, this is having an impact on the position we are beginning to experience from families within our DSA community.

Requesting to opt your child out of state testing will have a negative impact to our school. Any student who opts out of testing will be counted as a zero on the state exam. The Denver Public Schools has determined that all test results, including opt outs will impact the overall performance rating on the School Performance Framework. With this scenario in mind, DSA could easily move from “Blue” status back to green or even to yellow if enough students opted out of testing. This would result in a major impact to the school performance allotment in our school budget, which could potentially cost DSA over \$100,000.00 in budget allocations.

In sharing this information we want you to have another piece of information in weighing your decision on this important matter. Please let any member of the administration know if you would like to discuss this further in person or over the phone. You can contact us by calling the main office at (720) 424-1700.

Sincerely,



William Kohut
Principal