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Montgomery County Superintendent to Parents: Upcoming State Tests Useless

By Lesli A. Maxwell on March 4, 2014 4:31 PM

Joshua Starr, the superintendent of the Montgomery County, Md., school system in suburban Washington, is already well-established as a **high-profile critic of current assessment policy**.

And now, the schools chief has sent that message directly to tens of thousands of parents in the 151,000-student district in a letter that basically tells them that the Maryland State Assessment that students in grades 3-8 must take in the coming weeks will be a colossal waste of time. That's because schools are now using the Common Core State Standards and the MSA tests are not aligned to the common core.

Of course, Starr puts it more delicately than that in his letter, but the message is crystal clear:

"I do not believe it is in the interest of our students or schools for the state of Maryland to administer the MSA this year, and many parents, educators, and local and state leaders feel the same way," he wrote in the letter, dated February 2014 and [posted on the district's website](#).

[On the Marc Media](#), a Washington-based multimedia communications company, published the letter on its website and [posted a short video interview](#) with Starr talking about the issue.

Starr explains to parents that even though Maryland has moved to the Common Core State Standards, students must take—for the final time before next year's debut of the PARCC common-core assessment—the old state reading and math exams that are not aligned with the new standards. He writes that there are no accountability requirements and no consequences connected to the test results for this year.

What Starr says in the video is more provocative than the letter. He says that high-level state officials, including Gov. Martin O'Malley, support the continuation of the test because they believe it "still means something" and the state would risk losing federal funding if it didn't administer the test. Starr also notes that state law requires any student who shows up on a scheduled testing day to be tested.

"I wish that weren't the case, I wish I could do something about it," he says in the video. "But the rules are that we have to give the MSA, so we will follow the rules."

As my colleague Catherine Gewertz [details in the Curriculum Matters blog](#), a growing number of states and districts are dealing with major pushback from parents who want their kids to skip the annual ritual of spring standardized testing this year, including in places where the common-core field tests from PARCC and Smarter Balanced will be the only assessment that students must take. The rejection of old-line state tests is [playing out most dramatically in Chicago](#), where a boycott of the upcoming Illinois Standards Achievement Test, or ISAT, has spread to more than 70 schools.

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