

April 6, 2015

Ms. Erin Schofield
Bristol Warren Regional School District
Policy Subcommittee
151 State Street
Bristol, RI 02809

Ms. Schofield:

Thank you for taking time to hear public comments on the proposed policy. I have a few specific points and questions for the committee.

First, as written the policy is silent on any ramifications for those who do not follow it. Can you please clarify, what happens to a 3rd grader if he doesn't take the exam? Will you prevent him from going on to 4th grade? What will be ramifications be for elementary school kids whose parents still refuse them to be tested? What about for high school kids? If a high school student meets every requirement except taking this test, will the district deny this child a high school diploma?

Second, in February, Tiverton passed a policy that would allow families to opt out of state assessments. I urge the members of this committee to reach out to the members of Tiverton's Committee to understand how they got comfortable with this policy, given that they are subject to the same state mandates we are. I am confident that they care about their schools and students as much as we do here in Bristol and I think it's in our district's best interest to ask them how they arrived at the policy they have.

Third, the fact that the policy is simply about *taking* the state wide assessments and not *passing* the assessments sets these apart from all other assessments. If a child refuses to take a history test or fails a spelling test, there are ramifications of that; they either do not pass the class or don't move on to the next grade. Until our district is confident that the quality of instruction and preparation is sufficient to allow the majority of children to achieve proficient on any state assessment, this committee cannot rightfully create policy to require taking these tests.

Fourth, please be clear with the families of the district on what the 'distinct disadvantage' the Superintendent expects for those who don't take the test. He referenced this disadvantage in letters sent to parents but it is a broad statement that I hope this committee can help clarify for the community.

As you know, the State House is currently considering legislation to allow parents across the state to opt their kids out of state assessments. Last week in her testimony to the House Subcommittee on Health Education and Welfare, Mary Ann Snider of Rhode Island Department of Education affirmed that RIDE needs to do a better job of supporting districts in creating policies to serve those parents who don't want their kids to take the

PARCC exam. Why would the district not seek that support for those families who, for whatever reason, feel strongly against having their kids take this test?

Regarding the recent article in the paper about our schools' commended status, RIDE's contention that 95% participation is required for the test is forcing the district to choose between parent's rights and state compliance. This committee's responsibility is to our district, and I urge this subcommittee and the entire school committee to work with our community to argue against such unreasonable state policy.

In closing, I call on this committee to proactively seek the input from the families of this district regarding this policy. Dr. Andrade's post of the policy four days ago is a good step in the right direction, but far more needs to be done to engage the public on a policy of this magnitude. Thorough public conversation around this issue needs to occur to ensure that the district families are clear on this policy and that it reflects the values of our community.

I am happy to answer questions or engage in a dialogue on this issue with the subcommittee and look forward to getting answers to the questions I've raised.

Respectfully,

Tracy Ramos

Cc: Lynn Wainright, John Saviano

Enclosures

- Tiverton School Committee Policy for Opting Out
- House Bill H5845
- Ramos Testimony at the House Hearing for House Bill H5845
- Sample Letter from Dr. Andrade referencing "distinct academic disadvantage in the near future"