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Dear Parents/Guardians:

I am writing today to share some exciting news with our school community about how we assess student progress. Over the past year, the Rochester School District, along with three other districts (Epping, Sanborn and Souhegan), has partnered with the New Hampshire Department of Education to build a new accountability system, Performance Assessment for Competency Education (PACE). Why were we and the other districts selected to participate in this groundbreaking work? We are considered locally and nationally to be leaders of competency-based learning. It is a testament to the magnitude of work our school communities have undertaken to strive for excellence in teaching and learning. What a proud moment for our students, teachers, administrators, families and greater community!

PACE is a first-in-the-nation accountability strategy that offers a reduced level of standardized testing together with locally developed summative performance assessments. The locally developed summative performance assessments are more integrated into students' day-to-day work than current standardized tests *and* are created by our teachers. We know that meaningful assessment is a key part of a strategy to ensure students are engaged and getting the most out of their learning.

Performance assessments require students to get involved in solving complex problems. Students must think; they must access the skills they have learned and apply them to new situations. An important component of our performance assessments is that students, no matter the content area, must demonstrate that they are competent writers. The ability to write and think critically will help ensure that our students are prepared for future learning and work opportunities.

In order to help families better understand our use of performance assessments and the PACE accountability strategy, we have developed a list of some frequently asked questions that can be reviewed on our School District home page www.rochesterschools.com. However, if you have additional questions, please do not hesitate to speak with your child's teacher and/or principal.

Thank you for all you do each and every day to be engaged in and supportive of your child's learning.

Sincerely,

Michael L. Hopkins
Superintendent of Schools

Mary A. Moriarty
Assistant Superintendent of Schools

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Performance Assessments & PACE Accountability Strategy

Frequently Asked Questions

What are performance assessments?

Performance assessments are defined as multistep assignments with clear criteria, expectations, and processes that measure how well a student transfers knowledge, applies complex skills, and uses study practices to create or refine an original product.

Why does the Rochester School District want to use performance assessments?

Performance assessments require a deeper understanding of content, which means our students will have this knowledge to draw on for future learning and work opportunities.

Who in the Rochester School District is using performance assessments?

In our district, all teachers 1 – 12 are creating and using summative performance assessments. In addition to including specific grade-level content competencies in the performance assessments, all teachers this year are including argument/opinion writing. Argument/opinion writing has been a focus this year for our district. No matter the content area, teachers are using the district's K -12 writing rubrics.

Why include writing?

Research supports that when students write it has significant and positive effects on their learning. Specifically, “when students improve the quantity and quality of their writing, they improve in reading comprehension, math, science and social studies.” (Writing Boosts Achievement, Doug Reeves)

What are examples of performance assessments?

In English, middle school students might submit research papers showing that they know how to analyze and present information from many sources. In math, fourth-graders might design and cost out a new park and write a letter to their city councilors arguing their perspective based on their calculations and other evidence.

How do performance assessments fit with Performance Assessment for Competency Education (PACE)?

The PACE project has been widely followed in education circles as demonstrating a strategy for reducing the nation's reliance on standardized testing while providing assessments that give meaningful feedback for students, parents and teachers. Beginning this year, the four PACE-implementing districts will give the Smarter Balanced statewide assessment once per content area (ELA/Math) in elementary school, middle school and high school – three times per content area instead of seven. In the offsetting years that students don't take the statewide assessment, the PACE districts will administer carefully designed common and local “performance assessments” developed by the districts themselves and validated at the state level. What is so powerful about the summative assessments used as part of PACE is that they have been created by our teachers and fit directly with the work our students are engaged in on a daily basis. They matter to our students.

When will my child be taking the performance assessments?

Although all students in grade 1 – 12 are taking performance assessments throughout the year, only specific grades/content areas will be taking performance assessments that will be included in the PACE accountability system. Your child's school will share specific time periods when the PACE performance assessments will be administered. The table on the following page outlines which grades/content areas are included for PACE.

What is the Smarter Balanced statewide assessment?

Since 2006, New Hampshire has administered the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) in English-Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science to students in grades 3 through 8 and in grade 11. English-Language Arts and Mathematics were administered in the fall, and Science was administered in the spring. The fall of 2013 marked the final administration of the NECAP in English-Language Arts and Mathematics. In its place, students in grades 3 through 8 and in grade 11 will participate in the Smarter Balanced assessments. The reason for the change is that in 2010, the New Hampshire State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English-Language Arts and Mathematics. The Smarter Balanced assessment is aligned to the CCSS. As a PACE district, our students will only be taking the Smarter Balanced assessments once per content area (ELA/Math) during elementary, middle school and high school (see table below). Although the Science NECAP is still administered by the State, our students will participate in performance assessments instead of the Science NECAP. Your child's school will share specific time periods when the Smarter Balanced assessment will be administered.

How will I know how my child is doing?

Your child's results on his/her summative performance assessments are part of your child's competency-based grade. You can regularly check your child's progress through the Infinite Campus parent portal and/or during the grade reports sent home throughout the school year. Once the Smarter Balanced assessment results are received by the school, they will be shared with families.

What if my child has special needs?

Your child's Individual Education Plan (IEP) Team will work together to make sure that any accommodations, if necessary, are in place for your child during the summative performance assessments and/or Smarter Balanced assessment. If you have questions, please contact your child's Special Education Case Manager.

What is the PACE accountability strategy?

In the past, school accountability was measured through results on one point in time and one assessment, the NECAP. The PACE accountability strategy will look at various factors to determine if schools are demonstrating progress. These factors will include our competency-based grades, performance assessment scores and Smarter Balanced results. This will provide a multi-faceted view of how our students and schools are doing. Our district progress on PACE and other district identified goals will be shared in our annual district report card. Our report card can be found on our district's website homepage: www.rochesterschools.com.

How can I find out more information on PACE and Smarter Balanced Assessment?

Additional information for PACE can be found at <http://www.education.nh.gov/assessment-systems/pace.htm> ; and for Smarter Balanced assessment at <http://www.education.nh.gov/instruction/assessment/sbac/index.htm>.

Grade/Content Areas Participating in PACE & Smarter Balanced Assessments			
Grade Level	English Language Arts	Mathematics	Science
3 rd	Smarter Balanced	PACE	
4 th	PACE	Smarter Balanced	PACE
5 th	PACE	PACE	
6 th	PACE	PACE	
7 th	PACE	PACE	
8 th	Smarter Balanced	Smarter Balanced	PACE
11 th	Smarter Balanced	Smarter Balanced	
Additional PACE Assessments for High School Courses			
English 9	English 10	Algebra B	Geometry
Moving Earth and the Stars Above	Energy in Motion	Biology	