

Dear Osprey Families,

We want to share with you the latest updates about standardized testing for the 2015-16 school year at AHS. As you know from our communication in the fall, we were awaiting some decisions from the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) before we could determine exactly which tests we would be required to administer at which grade level. The dust has settled now on those state-level conversations, and our testing schedule for the spring is now confirmed as follows:

2015-16 Standardized Tests per Grade Level

Our **9th grade students** will take the [PARCC](#) English Language and Math tests April 11-15. The test will take a total of about 10 hours, spread out over the five days.

10th grade students will take the [PSAT](#) on April 20. The state has determined that we will move from ACT to SAT for all juniors, beginning next year. Therefore, sophomores will take the PSAT in preparation for the SAT, which they will take next year. The PSAT will take about 3 hours.

Our **11th grade students** will take the [Colorado ACT](#) on April 19th and the test takes about three hours to complete. Originally, in December, the CDE announced juniors would take the SAT this spring, but due to concerns raised by a significant number of educators around the state, they reversed this decision and determined that this year's juniors would take the ACT. The ACT takes about 3 hours.

In addition to the ACT, juniors will take the [CMAS](#) Science exam on April 21. This test will take approximately 6 hours.

We will not administer any standardized tests for our **Seniors**.

All upcoming tests this year will be administered online rather than with pencil and paper.

Opting Out

We recognize that some families have strong feelings around standardized testing and many have chosen to opt out in the recent past. Last year was the first year for PARCC to be administered, and across the nation, families opted out to register their opposition to what they saw as too many tests at the expense of authentic learning in the classroom. We encourage you to follow and participate in this conversation as it continues, both locally and nationally, as it can often be part of a rich dialogue about the purpose of education.

It's important to share how opting out can impact both the student individually and the school as a whole. As a school, if we drop below a 95% participation rate on any test we could potentially lose our accreditation or at least have it downgraded. This would lead to additional oversight from outside agencies, at the expense of the school, thus potentially diverting money away from the classroom. Most colleges rely on the SAT and ACT scores in determining college admission, and we take seriously our goal of preparing all students for college and postsecondary success. For students, taking the tests that lead up to the ACT and SAT can help improve their performance and score, as they become more familiar with the format and practice the skill of test taking. A large aspect of doing well on standardized exams is familiarity

and since our students do not take a lot of traditional exams, participation in the state-mandated exams enables our students to avoid being at a competitive disadvantage when the time comes for them to take the ACT or SAT.

As a school, we can be negatively impacted if we see high rates of opting out. Last year only, our accreditor, Colorado Charter School Institute (CSI), chose not to use the CMAS and PARCC scores in their determination of school ratings. CSI awarded us their highest designation--School of Distinction--in 2014, and that rating was upheld for 2015. This year, CSI will once again use our test scores as part of the data that determines our rating. Being named a School of Distinction is important in that it shows that we are educationally and fiscally sound; only eight CSI schools currently have this honor. As we are on the cusp of a capital campaign that will hopefully get us into a 21st century facility within the next few years, having this designation from our authorizer is critical to our future success. Test scores are one of the ways funders evaluate whether or not to support the school.

That said, we also want to be clear that no students or families will face negative consequences from the school for opting out of state assessments. We recognize and respect that this is a decision you will each make individually, and only ask that you make an informed choice based on the impact to the school and your student.

If you do choose to opt out, please submit a letter expressing your decision to the Main Office, signed by a parent/guardian. Parent refusal notices will be gathered and maintained by Libby Cowles, Assistant Head of School.

As always, please feel free to reach out with concerns and questions.