Dear Parents and Community Members,

To those celebrating today, I hope that you are having a happy Easter holiday.

As I stated in my last few newsletters, PARCC testing begins this coming Monday, March 28, for grades 3-8. In response to the start of testing, an email was sent by PTO leadership to its members, providing guidance for how parents can opt their students out from taking the test. As the principal and a member of the PTO, I cannot endorse this stance for the following reasons:

• This test will most likely become the district accountability assessment that will be used to determine school quality performance rating (our Level 1+ status), student promotion criteria, and student acceptance into selective enrollment high schools in the near future. Students who are not exposed to the assessment this year, when the assessment does not count towards these things, will be less prepared when the assessment is high-stakes.

• I met with teacher teams this winter to review our PARCC student performance data from last year. While there is much to be improved in how this data is presented to schools, we were able to analyze student performance to identify strengths and areas of opportunity across our school and make informed arguments for how the data presented to us could be improved to make our analysis even stronger.

• The more exposure students have to PARCC questions, the better we are as a school in assessing our school-wide and individual student needs. In looking at our curricula PK though 8th grade, our teachers align their daily learning objectives to the Common Core State Standards. PARCC questions echo the types of tasks that our intermediate grade students complete when they analyze the texts in their Storyworks readings, for example. Students successfully responding to PARCC questions helps get us closer as a school towards mastery of the Common Core State Standards.

As the school administrator, I am obligated to follow guidelines established by the state. Guidelines say that all students must be offered the test. If a student refuses to take the test, alternate activities will not be provided for those students, which presents an additional obstacle for us in helping students meet their academic goals.

Additionally, if fewer than 95% of our students district-wide do not take the assessment, state and federal funding can be withheld. While that would be an unprecedented action, given the current state of our school-wide and district-wide budgets, the potential loss of these resources presents a great risk to Solomon and the district.

Please know that I will respect a parent's informed decision, and we will continue to work cooperatively with parents and students who make that decision. Parents who do not want their students to take the assessment have the right to have their student refuse the test. Please also know why I cannot endorse what the PTO has shared. As the administrator for the school, I must take into account today's needs and balance them with anticipated future needs. For that reason, I feel the risks outweigh the benefits of not taking the assessment.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to email me or call me on my cell phone.

Best,

Chris