TO: All Principals and Headmasters

FROM: Nicole Wagner, Executive Director of the Office of Data and Accountability

CC: Tommy Chang, Superintendent
Doannie Tran, Assistant Superintendent of Professional Learning
Principal Leaders

DATE: August 23, 2015

SUBJECT: 2015-16 Assessment Schedule

Changes from SY 2014-15:

The attached assessment schedule and administration requirements have been adopted after consultation and input from the Superintendent’s Cabinet. The changes adopted for this year’s assessment calendar (attached here) reflect the concerns raised by teachers and some principals about the number of tests students take over the course of the year, and the purposes of each. Because schools vary substantially in terms of performance across the district, assessment requirements are differentiated. For all schools, the total number of formative assessments in grades 3 through 11 has been reduced from five to three. Specifically, Predictive Assessments will not be administered in SY 2015-16. For all Level 1 and Level 2 schools paced interim assessments are optional.

Assessment Purposes:

We believe schools that are consistently high performing and showing growth use high quality data from a variety of sources, engage leadership teams and teachers in analyzing the data,
establish shared goals based on the data, and adjust their teaching practice accordingly to meet the needs of all students. Well-designed formative assessments are tools to this end. However, schools also must have structures and protocols in place to make effective use of the data. Great schools demonstrate high levels of collaborative efficacy with inquiry structures and protocols in place, embedded within and led by Instructional Leadership Teams, to ensure there is time and a method for teacher collaboration. Where structures and processes do not exist to make data use a collective habit, assessment results and data are at best used for ad-hoc, individual improvement.

We recognize the variety of purposes district assessments are designed to meet. These include state and district accountability, educator effectiveness, diagnosing student needs, and ongoing monitoring and adjustment of classroom instruction. Regardless of the purpose, if assessment data are not used to inform decision-making, assessments are reduced to compliance activities. Additionally, we recognize that at their own discretion, schools use other assessments for similar purposes. In light of these points, the following changes to the district’s assessment schedule are made for SY 2015-16.

**Predictive Assessments:** Due to shifts in standardized end of year assessments, predictive assessments will not be administered in SY 2015-16.

**Paced Interim Assessments:** Paced interim assessments are designed to follow the district’s scope and sequence guidelines and content is limited to what has been taught. These assessments are designed to inform standards-based instruction and inform re-teaching in order to ensure students meet expected competencies. For SY 2015-16, the district will provide three paced interim assessments. Schools in accountability Levels 1 and 2 and all autonomous schools may administer paced interim assessments at their discretion. Schools in accountability Levels 3 and 4 (who are not autonomous schools) are required to administer paced interim assessments (i.e. ATI or ANET). All schools are expected to use these or other standards-based formative assessments to monitor student mastery of content and quality of instruction.

**End-Of-Year Assessments:** These assessments are curriculum-aligned and can be used for grading and promotion decisions. At the district level, they can be used for program selection and evaluation purposes (e.g. summer school). These assessments will be optional for schools in SY 2015-16.

**Early Literacy Assessments:** Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS) assessments and tools have been designed to monitor students’ progress in acquiring basic literacy skills such as phonological awareness, alphabetic principle, accuracy and fluency with connected text, vocabulary, and comprehension. These assessments and tools are available through the MCLASS platform where teachers and schools can progress monitor students over the course of the year, using the assessment itself as an early warning indicator for students in
need of reading intervention. In SY 2015-16, schools are expected to administer this assessment with students in grades K - 2 and monitor student progress over the course of the school year.

Additionally, running record assessments, such as Text Reading Comprehension (TRC) are available through the MCLASS platform and are highly recommended in order to track the progress of individual students’ ability to comprehend and make meaning of grade level text. These assessments are optional, but will be supported centrally for grades K - 2, if schools who choose to make use of the assessment.

Reflected in this assessment schedule is a belief that strong schools have established data inquiry cycles that rely on high quality assessments, whether provided by the district, developed by their own teachers, or by third parties. It also reflects the belief that assessments are tools to help improve instructional practice. On their own and without the structures and processes to translate the resulting data into actionable information, they cannot lead to systemic improvements.

Additional optional assessments will be provided in the following areas:

- High Quality Data Based Questions (DBQ) Project Writing Assessments for History/Social Studies in grades 6-8 and high schools
- Assessments with PARCC-like items to be administered online
- Curriculum-embedded tasks with stronger alignment to the new MA standards
- School-requested assessments, as capacity allows