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March 5, 2015

Matthew Zarro, Director, K-12 Services

Erin Collichio, Associate Director, K-12

Dear Dr. Zarro and Dr. Collichio:

I write this letter as the President of ESSAA, a professional association representing well over 3,000 public school administrators in New York, to express my concern with the implementation of the PSAT dates for 2015 – 2016. The PSAT is an extraordinarily important exam because it determines National Merit; therefore, the Wednesday dates as they stand force our schools into a proverbial “no-win” situation. They must provide the test, but in doing so, most schools are forced to re-locate hundreds of desks from classrooms to a large area such as the gymnasium leaving instructional spaces empty for the remaining students. Therefore, they must suspend classes for the entire day. This is not acceptable. Schools cannot be made to suspend classes for 75% of our students while 25% take an exam.

Although there have been some good suggestions from the College Board such as having a community service day or a career fair day, most districts already have these days planned as part of the school counseling plan and need all the instructional time possible. Making matters worse, October 14 is in the same week as Columbus Day - so the administration of the tests will make an already disjointed week more fragmented.

I understand this concept has been piloted through BOCES and the Big 5 districts and that the goal is to increase the participation of students in the PSAT's, thus opening more doors to other opportunities they may have not been afforded prior. These are noble goals. However, suburban districts have different needs and therefore are seeking a choice of Saturday or Wednesday test

administrations leaving the choice up to the individual districts to serve the best interests for their own population. We see no harm in this flexible approach.

We don't believe that the Saturday option will hinder students from taking the PSAT/NMSQT due to lack of transportation or work, sports, or other extracurricular activities for two reasons. Most districts and other institutions plan athletic contests and other activities with great consideration to standardized tests and their importance to contributing to building a child's future career pathway.

Offering the PSAT/NMSQT on a school day can provide administration dates that complement school calendars and avoid conflict with religious holidays. However, many districts already had their calendars set and approved through their Board of Education prior to the email announcement.

As you stated in your announcement, "To ensure that all students can have the opportunity to participate, we made a choice to hold both administrations on Wednesdays. This choice is anchored in our data and feedback from our schools, which show that school-day administrations expand student access." I ask you ensure that all students can participate to have a choice of a Wednesday and Saturday administration anchored in our data and feedback. I am not sure who your target feedback came from but many districts did not have any input or opportunity for feedback.

Again, we ask for your consideration in modifying the upcoming schedule.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "William M. Evans". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'W'.

William M. Evans  
ESSAA President