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Commissioner

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Dear Superintendent,

I wanted to take this opportunity to share with you an important update regarding new guidance for the state Writing Assessment. **As part of our ongoing efforts to enhance the assessment process, we are strongly encouraging all schools to complete the Writing Assessment in a single test session.** The Writing Assessment is an un-timed test, and while many students already complete the writing assessment in a single session, some schools have extended the writing session across multiple days. However, the Writing Assessment is a single prompt test and is structured to be completed within a single session, with short breaks allowed. It is not designed nor meant to be completed across multiple days.

Students may take breaks (under 20 minutes) as needed during the test session, and there is no time limit to the test session itself, but schools should make every effort to complete the Writing Assessment in a single session. The Department recognizes that schedules have been set for this Spring, particularly with the change to the Writing Window for this year. This letter represents Department guidance and is not a mandatory policy change.

This guidance is grounded in several key considerations. Firstly, the nature of the Writing Assessment, with its focus on a single prompt, necessitates completion within a single session to accurately capture students' writing proficiency in a standardized environment without compromising the security of the test. Further, data analysis shows that the average time to complete the writing test is 1 hour or less, and more than 90% of all students in grades 3 through 8 complete the writing test in 2 hours or less. Removing the time limit altogether may inadvertently exacerbate testing anxiety among students, as they lack clear parameters for when their writing task is considered complete. Some students who could demonstrate their proficiency in a shorter amount of time may continue working beyond what is reasonably expected when allowed or encouraged to keep writing over multiple days. Moreover, allowing students to extend this timeframe significantly, particularly to 4 hours or more, can result in the loss of valuable instructional time in the classroom.

The guidance to administer the Writing Assessment in a single test session aims to provide a fair and consistent testing environment while maximizing instructional time and mitigating unnecessary stress for students. Finally, this guidance is not applicable to students with IEP's or 504 plans that require additional time beyond a reasonably scheduled single test session. All schools should continue to provide extended time accommodations to students who require additional time as a condition of an IEP or a 504, to ensure that the writing test remains accessible for all students.

The Department is also recommending that students complete test sessions for reading, math, and science in a single session when possible and appropriate. The following table shows the average test time, by grade, for each subject during the 2023 Spring administration for reference:

	Writing Mean Test Time	Reading Mean Test Time	Math Mean Test Time
Grade 3	1 hr 6 min	1 hr 14 min	1 hr 9 min
Grade 4	1 hr 13 min	1 hr 8 min	1 hr 7 min
Grade 5	1 hr 10 min	1 hr 6 min	1 hr 9 min
Grade 6	1 hr 1 min	1 hr 2 min	1 hr 8 min

Grade 7	1 hr 2 min	1 hr	1 hr
Grade 8	56 min	54 min	56 min

The Department is committed to ensuring that the state assessment system is fair and accessible to all students, provides the maximum amount of proficiency data in an appropriate time frame, and follows all state and federal regulations for validity and reliability. To that end, the Bureau of Assessment and Accountability plans to convene a group of stakeholders, including superintendents and curriculum administrators this spring to discuss testing times, test session durations, and future guidance.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to reach out directly. We are here to assist you in whatever way that we can to ensure the successful administration of the NH SAS.

Best regards,

Dr. Nate Greene
Bureau Administrator
Assessment and Accountability