



To: Phil Williams, WTVF-TV, NewsChannel 5
From: Communications Office, Metro Nashville Public Schools
Date: November 2, 2015
Re: EOC Concerns

Beginning late in the week of October 19 and continuing throughout the week of October 26, there have been regular email and telephone conversations – often daily – to address your questions related to accusations that some Metro high schools are using various methods to avoid administering state-mandated End-of-Course (EOC) exams to certain students in order to inflate their performance data. As stated numerous times throughout these conversations, we take these accusations extremely seriously. We asked for evidence of specific wrong-doing in your possession so that the instances in question can be thoroughly investigated and to allow us to fully respond to your story.

Below is a comprehensive response to the questions you have posed thus far related to the “general EOC concerns” story you say is scheduled to air this evening, Monday, Nov. 2, 2015. This response includes questions and requests of us, along with a summary of how we have fulfilled them. Further responses may follow related to other specific concerns you plan to address in future stories.

General Statement on EOC Exams

Students are required to take all state-mandated EOC exams at the end of the second semester of a course regardless of when or how they complete the course. To determine if there is evidence of a wide-spread trend with students not completing the required EOCs, over the last week our Research and Evaluation department has been carefully reviewing transcript and EOC exam files for the most recent cohort of MNPS graduates.

Records reviewed to date indicate that there is no evidence of systematic avoidance of EOC exams. We have found a relatively small number of students who received a regular high school diploma in the spring of 2015 and who took EOC courses in our schools but do not appear to have ever attempted the EOC exam. The department went through several years of files in order to track students’ course and test history. Our investigation is focused on the courses for which the Tennessee Department of Education establishes accountability targets, called Annual Measureable Objectives (AMOs), which requires each high school to have a 95% participation rate on EOC exams.

With a 2015 graduating class of 4,221 students, they should have collectively taken 16,884 exams with AMOs over the course of their high school careers. Of those 16,884 exams, the district lacks a test record for only 231 or 1.37%. These cases appear to be spread out and not

unusually high for any particular school. All high schools fall within the 1-2% range. Given an average daily attendance rate of 93%, there will be students that never make up an EOC. There may also be some who took the EOC at another time outside of MNPS or whose student ID was incorrectly coded on an EOC answer sheet and who do not match our course enrollment files.

The 231 missed EOC exams are broken down as follows: There were 44 students missing an Algebra I EOC test record and 10 students marked absent. An answer sheet is supposed to be turned in for every student enrolled in the course, and those that do not test or make up the test should be coded as absent. It is likely that many, if not most, of those students missing an EOC document were absent during testing and an answer sheet marked "absent" was not submitted. There were 32 missing an Algebra II EOC and 32 more marked absent. For English II, 26 had no test record and 16 were shown as absent. There were 35 missing for English III and 36 absent.

If NewsChannel 5 is in possession of documentation that contradicts the district's findings of its own internal review described above, Metro Schools requests to be given access to the documentation immediately to allow us to thoroughly investigate the claims. Likewise, if former or current MNPS employees are in possession of documentation that indicates a systematic attempt to inflate performance data for individual schools, those individuals are urged to bring their concerns forward to district leadership so that they can be properly investigated. We have no record of an open complaint of this nature.

Use of Credit Recovery in High Schools

Metro Nashville Public Schools has made personalized learning the focus of our instructional practice. Our goal is to prepare every student for success in college and career, which personalized learning allows us to do. Personalized learning involves teachers meeting students where they are, regularly monitoring their progress, and moving students forward only when they're able to demonstrate mastery of the content. This includes intervening as early as possible when a student's performance indicates he or she is failing to master the content of a course.

As part of this approach, credit recovery is offered to high school students who fail a semester of a course. If a student fails a course in the fall to the degree that grade-averaging the two semesters is unlikely to result in the student passing the course as a whole, the student is given the option to take the fall course through credit recovery before proceeding to the spring course. For example, a student who fails "Algebra I Fall" will be given the option to retake the fall course of Algebra I during the spring semester. The student will then take "Algebra I Spring" during the summer semester or subsequent fall semester. All attempts are made to place the student in "Algebra 1 Spring" during the following summer or fall. If there is a scheduling conflict, the student may have to wait to the following spring to take the spring course.

It is in the best interest of the student to take this approach because if he or she has not mastered the content of a fall course, he or she will be ill-prepared to succeed in the spring course, which builds on the content knowledge from the fall. The decision to enter into credit

recovery is made by the student and his or her parent/guardian in consultation with the teacher and the student's counselor.

If a student takes a spring course during the summer of fall semester, he or she will take the EOC at that time. Meaning a student who fails Algebra I this fall may take the Algebra I EOC in July or December of 2016, depending on when he or she completes both courses.

The opinion that this approach to instruction is intended solely to inflate EOC scores is misguided. This is a standard practice used by school districts in our state. The fact that the state's testing calendar allows for EOCs to be taken in the spring and summer is evidence that this practice is supported by the state. The state does not use EOCs to measure the academic performance of a specific grade level. Unlike grades K through 8, high school courses are offered to students based on their individual academic level. For example, an advanced student may take Algebra I in eighth grade instead of ninth grade, in which case the EOC score is calculated into the middle school's math data, rather than the high school the student goes on to attend. Similarly, students who take AP classes do not take EOC exams for those subjects, therefore their academic performance is not included in the high school's overall EOC data. EOC data is intended to reflect the high school's ability to successfully teach the state standards in main subject areas, regardless of when the student takes the course during his or her time in high school. There is a clear disincentive for high schools to unnecessarily delay a student's promotion among courses since the state calculates a high school's graduation rate based on "on-time" graduates, defined as students who graduate within four years and one summer of starting high school. Because all students are required to earn four math credits and four English credits, when they are delayed from completing one of those required credits it risks requiring the student to take more than four years to graduate.

Most importantly, our focus is on helping students succeed. Ultimately, our goal is to prepare every student for college and career. **If a student requires extra time to successfully master the content of a course, we believe the student should be allowed that time. Forcing students to progress in course schedules when they are not prepared to understand or master the content would equate to setting our students up for failure.**

Use of Content Recovery in High Schools

In addition to "credit recovery," which is a student re-taking a failed semester of a course, Metro Schools also offers "content recovery" courses to support students who are struggling with the foundational skills needed to succeed in an EOC course.

For example, the district offers "Algebra I A," a content recovery course to support students enrolled in Algebra I. The Algebra I A course may cover basic math skills, such as fractions, based on what underlining knowledge is needed for a student to understand the Algebra lessons. Similar classes are offered for English courses, and are listed as "English I CAR," with "CAR" standing for Content Area Reading.

It is district practice for students to be enrolled in content recovery courses either simultaneously or prior to taking an EOC course. A content recovery course cannot be taken in place of an EOC course. Although students do earn credits for content recovery courses, the

credits do not qualify for the math or English credits required for graduation. Additionally, enrollment in a content recovery course does not negate a student's requirement to take the EOC exam at the end of the second semester of the EOC course.

Pearl-Cohn Entertainment Magnet High School

- You claim:
 - Pearl-Cohn has removed students from EOC exam classes and placed them in independent study courses as a means of avoiding their scores from affecting the school's overall EOC score. You intimate in an email to Principal Sonia Stewart that direction for this practice is coming from supervision in the district office.
- We responded:
 - Verbally on the phone the week of Oct. 26 explaining the district's practice of remediation with students who are failing EOC classes. Further detail and explanation is provided above in the statements on credit recovery and content recovery.
- You asked for:
 - All course offerings for Fall 2015 and number of students enrolled in each class
- We fulfilled this request on Friday, Oct. 30, 2015

Stratford STEM Magnet School

- You claim:
 - Students being "physically pulled" from EOC exam rooms or barred from entering EOC exam rooms.
- We responded:
 - Verbally on the phone the week of Oct. 26 explaining Stratford's EOC participation rate is consistently 95% or above for the last two years. The data is as follows:
 - Algebra I – 100% in 2014 and 97% in 2015
 - Algebra II – 95% in 2014 and 96% in 2015
 - English II – 98% in 2014 and 98% in 2015
 - English III – 96% in 2014 and 95% in 2015
 - We further explained that given the AMOs of 95% participation and average daily attendance of 93%, there is no incentive for principals to withhold students from EOC exams, lest they risk failing to meet the AMO.
- You asked for:
 - All course offerings for Fall 2015 and number of students enrolled in each class
- We fulfilled this request on Friday, Oct. 30, 2015.

Hunters Lane High School

- You claim:
 - Hunters Lane has removed students from EOC exam classes and placed them in elective courses as a means of avoiding their scores from affecting the school's overall EOC score.

- We responded:
 - Verbally on the phone the week of Oct. 26 explaining the district's practice of remediation with students who are failing EOC classes. Further detail and explanation is provided in the above statements on credit recovery and content recovery.
- You asked for:
 - All course offerings for Fall 2015 and number of students enrolled in each class
- We fulfilled this request on Oct. 30, 2015.
- On Oct. 29, you asked for:
 - Insight into the situation of a specific Hunters Lane student who was allegedly removed from EOC courses she was passing.
- Our response:
 - We are still investigating the details of this student, including a close look at the student's data. However, there are extenuating circumstances surrounding this particular student, which are part of her private record and may not be discussed with you without a written waiver from the parent/guardian.

Maplewood High School

- You claim:
 - Without knowing the specific mechanism being used, that students are being either pulled from EOC classes or prevented from taking EOC exams.
- We responded:
 - Verbally on the phone the week of Oct. 26 explaining the district's practice of remediation with students who are failing EOC classes. Further detail and explanation is provided in the above statements on credit recovery and content recovery.
- You claim:
 - A source reported to you seeing an email from Jay Steele giving direction in this practice.
- We responded:
 - Verbally on the phone the week of Oct. 26 that no such email is known to exist, but that it could have been confused with an email sent by Aimee Wyatt on Feb. 11, 2014, to high school principals giving guidance on how to use credit recovery for course remediation. You were provided a copy of this email.
- You asked for:
 - All course offerings for Fall 2015 and number of students enrolled in each class
- We fulfilled this request on Oct. 30, 2015.

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