

**GOVERNMENT OF THE DISTRICT OF COLUMBIA**  
**Office of the Deputy Mayor for Education**

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**Memorandum**

**Subject:** Report on DC CAS Testing Security Protocols

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The District of Columbia has a rigorous system of accountability and assessment. In fact, *Education Week's* annual Quality Counts report from 2008 showed that the District of Columbia was among a few states where standards for assessment are clear, specific and grounded in content at all levels for English/language arts, math, and science for elementary, middle and high schools.

**DC CAS, the District's Assessment Tool**

An aligned system of coherent standards and rigorous assessments is key to measuring performance – of our students, teachers, schools, and districts – and determining whether the District is on the right track with its education reform efforts. One measure of performance is the DC CAS, the annual assessment used by the District of Columbia to determine student proficiency in reading and math in grades 3-8 and grade 10. Select grades also participate in a composition assessment (grades 4, 7, 10) or a science assessment (grades 5, 8, 10). The 2010 DC CAS will be the fifth administration of this assessment. Student achievement results from the DC CAS are used to make accountability determinations under the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB).

In 2008, the students demonstrated dramatic progress on the DC CAS. Statewide, the number of students who scored proficient or higher increased by 7 percent in reading and 10 percent in math. DCPS elementary students produced gains of 8 percent in reading and 11 percent in math, while the number of students scoring proficient in reading and math increased by 9 percent. The final results of the 2009 DC Comprehensive Assessment System (DC CAS) show continued progress in student achievement. Overall, reading scores are up 3 points and math scores are up 6 points over 2008. Reading and math scores went up in both elementary and secondary schools and across District of Columbia Public Schools (DCPS) and public charter schools (PCS).

**Ensuring Testing Integrity**

As part of a culture of accountability, educators and administrators, public officials, and the community at large must be confident in the measures of student achievement; the District must

have certainty that test results are accurate and credible. Teachers and students need to be able to demonstrate their hard work and performance in an environment in which results are sound. Therefore, it is critical that both the state and districts (DCPS and charter schools) have measures in place to ensure testing integrity. To that end, DC has taken great strides over the past two years to improve testing security and procedures.

Ensuring testing integrity happens at all stages of the testing cycle. School districts must have testing policies and protocols in place, covering everything from administration and proctoring to handling of the test booklets and answer sheets. School-level staff must be trained on effective practices and understand the rules for ensuring testing security. During the test administration, central offices must coordinate with school staff to monitor daily test performance and problem-solve as issues arise. Monitoring and evaluation of school performance as it relates to appropriate testing implementation is also an important component. In the post-test phase, districts should review testing events with their school administrators and determine whether any further review is required. Scoring and calculation of results should include analysis of the answer sheets and other data to identify further issues requiring investigation. Finally, districts should use each testing cycle as a focus point to ensure that the assessment delivers what it should – an accurate measure of student achievement and progress.

### **Erasure Analysis of the 2008 DC CAS**

Consistent with practice of most states, the Office of the State Superintendent of Education (OSSE) requested an analysis by the testing company of the student answer sheets on the 2008 DC CAS administered in April 2008. The goal of an erasure analysis is to identify schools and classrooms where the average number of incorrect student answers that were erased and replaced by correct answers is inordinately higher than the average in the state as a whole. The erasure analysis is used to screen for testing anomalies, but is not a conclusive measure of testing impropriety.

The erasure analyses of the 2008 DC CAS results were ultimately inconclusive. The analyses ‘flagged’ anomalies in certain DCPS schools and thirteen public charter schools. Two different analyses led to divergent data – the number of classrooms and the number of schools identified as having potential concerns varied significantly. The new administration at OSSE, along with DCPS, reviewed the methodology used and the data presented, and determined that insufficient guidance around interpretation and calculation created a confusing picture. Further, the testing company that performed the original erasure analysis advised OSSE that, “the statistic calculated for each school and classroom does not appear to be consistent with any known approach to analyzing erasure patterns. As a result, the approach... does not support evaluation of a hypothesis that cheating has occurred.” (see “March 7, 2009 memo from CTB McGraw-Hill to OSSE). Copies of the relevant documents are attached to this report.

### **Improvements in the 2009 DC CAS Protocols**

Clear and consistent test security policies, supported by training on those policies, and rigorous implementation of testing regulations and protocols are the most effective ways to guard against testing improprieties. Building on lessons learned from the 2008 analysis, OSSE, DCPS, and charter schools took further steps to increase testing integrity for the 2009 DC CAS.

In March 2009, OSSE issued and implemented new test security guidelines for the 2009 assessment administration. (see “District of Columbia State Test Security Guidelines”). These guidelines include instructions for districts to develop their own test security plans, requirements for teachers to acknowledge they have received test security practices, and procedures for monitoring the administration of DC CAS. For the first time, OSSE deployed over 40 testing monitors to DCPS and public charter schools to ensure test security guidelines were being followed. The State Superintendent has made testing integrity a priority and utilized her experience at the federal level to review other states’ testing policies to analyze best practices and determine how the District will improve.

Utilizing the state test security guidelines and input from external test security experts, DCPS developed and implemented a comprehensive plan for ensuring testing integrity for the April 2009 administration of the DC CAS. (see “ May 8, 2009 memo from DCPS to OSSE re: DCPS Testing Integrity Assurance Measures”). The plan includes school-level guidelines for test security; clearly defined violations of test security for students and adults; a reporting process for test violations; and consequences for violating test security procedures. Principals and test coordinators, as well as anyone having access to the assessment, completed test security agreements before the test was administered at each school. Test observers from the central office were also trained and prepared to work with schools on ensuring a safe testing environment at their schools, and test security violation forms were made available for staff. Finally, DCPS created a daily security checklist to be completed by test coordinators each day, which details the exact times that testing materials are checked in and out.

To make the test security plan effective, DCPS provided training for principals on data-driven decision-making, including a specific component on test security protocols and erasure analysis. Through this training, principals understood testing integrity as an integral part of using data to increase student achievement, reinforcing a culture of accountability that anchors the District’s education reform efforts.

Charter schools also developed testing procedures based on guidance from the testing manual and the OSSE test security plans. As an indication of the importance placed on test security, one charter school reported a violation and appropriate personnel action was taken by the school, along with a fine levied by OSSE.

The inconclusive results from the 2008 erasure analysis revealed room for improvement in post test review protocols. Erasure analysis is still a useful tool to verify testing integrity, and will be a component of the state’s testing contract going forward. Under the State Superintendent’s leadership, OSSE will develop policies and guidance around the interpretation of erasure analysis prior to the administration of the 2010 DC CAS. These policies will include coherent methodologies for analyzing the data and special guidance for districts on how to ensure that students are not discouraged from making erasures as part of their normal test-taking practice.

### **Continuous Improvement – Looking Ahead to 2010**

The District continues to work at the state level and with schools on ensuring that assessment results are fair and accurate reflections of student performance. In addition to the test security guidelines, OSSE is incorporating its review of best practices from other states and developing

additional training and technical assistance for districts in early winter to enhance their test security policies and procedures. DCPS is expanding on its training for school administrators and ensuring that testing integrity is understood clearly as a critical component of assessment. Finally, OSSE continues to seek input from stakeholders and national experts on its monitoring procedures and protocols to ensure that they fully support a strong testing integrity framework for the District.