

FairTest

National Center for Fair & Open Testing

Just Say No to Standardized Tests: Why and How to Opt Out

Testing overuse and misuse is damaging public education. It eats up classroom time, narrows curriculum and drives many students out of school. It perpetuates a false narrative of failure and puts schools in low-income communities at risk of closure or privatization.

“Opting out,” or refusing to take government-mandated standardized tests, is a powerful way to protest this educational malpractice. Nationally, hundreds of thousands of parents, teachers and students are fighting back against testing overkill by exercising their right to opt out, boycott or refuse. It’s one way to educate others about how the harms of excessive testing and an important way to tell policymakers they must change course.

The exploding opt-out movement has already achieved its first victories. It is altering state and local testing policies for the better, reducing the number of tests and lowering their stakes. A larger, stronger out-out movement can win even more substantial reforms.

Why opt out? By opting out, you can....

- **Send the message that school time should be used for teaching and learning, not testing and test prep.** The average student takes 112 tests between kindergarten and 12th grade, stealing precious time that could be used for in-depth, engaging learning. Schools focus on the demands of the tests, instead of the needs of the students.
- **Protest harmful uses of standardized exams.** These tests are frequently used in ways that do not reflect the abilities of students of color, English language learners, children with disabilities, and low-income youth. Many others with test anxiety do not test well.
- **Demand better ways to assess and promote student learning.** Standardized tests measure little of what parents and others want children to learn and experience in schools. They do not measure creativity, critical thinking, collaboration, leadership or empathy. Many schools narrow their focus to the tested subjects of math and reading. Other important subjects are sidelined. Opting out calls for better assessment models. FairTest has fact sheets, a report and other materials on performance assessment and other alternatives.
- **Prevent test results from being used to harm students, teachers and schools.** Increasingly, test results are used to label schools “underperforming” or “failing.” Many are then shut down or turned over to private operators. Opting out helps block the use of test results as weapons of destruction.

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- **Protect your child, a teacher, a school or a district from the harm of testing overuse and misuse.** One parent opting out can protect her own child from test abuse. Many parents opting out together send a unified message that students' time should be spent learning, not filling in bubbles on a test sheet. Urban parents can opt out to demand an end to school closures based on test scores and protest how testing fuels the school-to-prison pipeline. Suburban parents can do so to push for better use of classroom time and to show solidarity with urban parents. Students, parents and teachers can unite to stop the malpractice of using student test scores to evaluate educators.

How to Opt Out

- **What should parents do to refuse testing for their child?** Send the principal a letter saying you don't want your child to take the tests. It could be as basic as: *"I want to let you know we do not want our child, [name], to take part in the [name the standardized exam] this year. Please arrange for [him or her] to have a productive educational experience during the testing period."* Some states or districts have specific forms. Eight states have laws that allow opting out; no states have laws prohibiting it.

Note: The federal Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) recognizes parents' right to refuse testing in states or districts with opt-out laws. It requires districts to inform parents of state law and policy regarding test participation. It also mandates 95% test participation, but leaves it up to each state to decide what to do if a school or district does not reach 95%. No school or district has ever lost federal funding because of opt outs. Read our "Why You Can Boycott Standardized Tests without Fear of Federal Penalties to Your School" fact sheet at <http://www.fairtest.org/why-you-can-boycott-testing-without-fear>.

Helpful Opt-Out Resources

- **More than 650,000 students opted out in the 2014-15 school year;** see more at <http://www.fairtest.org/more-500000-refused-tests-2015>.
- **FairTest's Resistance Guide** offers links to a variety of information about other actions you can take to push for less testing, more learning and better assessments. http://www.fairtest.org/get_involved
- **See this guide to organizing by Jeanette Deutermann,** leader of the hugely successful Long Island Opt Out. <http://www.fairtest.org/guide-organizing-jeanette-deutermann>
- **FairTest has knowledgeable contacts in most states** who can provide valuable local information and advice about opting out. http://www.fairtest.org/get_involved/state_resources
- **FairTest follows the growing opt-out and boycott actions.** Every week we post a collection of news clips about the national testing resistance and reform movement at <http://www.fairtest.org/news/other>. You can sign up to get them delivered to your email address at <http://www.fairtest.org/weekly-news-signup>.
- **See FairTest's report on implementing performance assessment and other alternatives,** at <http://www.fairtest.org/assessment-matters-constructing-model-state-system>.
- **See also FairTest fact sheets** on testing, resistance and alternatives, at <http://www.fairtest.org/fact%20sheets>.
- **"112 tests":** See p. 25 of this Great City Schools report: <http://www.cgcs.org/cms/lib/dc00001581/centricity/domain/87/testing%20report.pdf>.