

# Opting Out of State Standardized Tests

A fact sheet from  
Citizens for Public Schools



## What is “opting out”?

It means refusing to take a standardized test such as PARCC or MCAS.

## Why should I opt my student out?

**To protect your child:** For many students, the Big Test can be very stressful.

**To improve education for all students:** Opting out is an effective way to protest the overuse and misuse of standardized tests, which forces schools to focus on the demands of the tests instead of the needs of students. Test obsession eats up classroom time, narrows curriculum, destroys children’s love of learning, and fuels the school-to-prison pipeline.

The opt-out movement has led to changes in state and local testing policies in other states. It can work here, too.

## Is opting out illegal?

**No.** State law says the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education must *give* tests to all students. But **the law does not say every student must *take* those tests and it does not provide for any penalties** to students who refuse, or their parents.

## What will my child do while the tests are administered?

State officials have told schools that if a student refuses the test, they should be allowed to read or do homework.

## Will opting out affect my child’s academic standing?

Passing the state high school tests is a requirement for a high school diploma. But **there is no state penalty for students who opt out in grades 3 – 8**. Some schools use the scores in choosing students for advanced work, but most do not. Check whether your school does. Email [lesstestingmorelearning@gmail.com](mailto:lesstestingmorelearning@gmail.com) if you have questions.

## Will opting out cause my student’s school to lose funding?

**No.** Parents have been told this, but it has never happened. Last year, 240,000 New York State students opted out, at least 20%; many districts had far higher percentages. No New

York school district lost any money. Federal officials did warn 12 states with high opt-out rates that if it happens again, they could lose a small amount of federal funds that pay for state administrative expenses. Massachusetts was not one of the 12.

## Will opting out hurt my school and school district?

Some school officials are telling parents that opting out can hurt their school's standing in the state rating system. "Level 1" requires 95% test participation. "Level 2" requires 90%.

Last year, the state promised not to lower any school or district's level if they agreed to use the PARCC test. But this year, state officials are saying their "hold harmless" promise will only prevent schools from having their level lowered because of a drop in scores. It won't apply to low participation.

However, even if a school's rating is reduced from level 1 to 2, or from 2 to 3, there's no actual punishment. The real "harm" begins at Level 4. Any school whose rating is lowered because of a high opt-out percentage should boast about that, because it means parents are engaged in their children's education – a key ingredient in quality education.

## How can I opt out my child?

Send the principal a letter saying you don't want your child to take the test. For example:

*"Dear —, I have asked my child, [name], not to take part in the [name the exam] this year. Please arrange for [him or her] to have a productive educational experience during the testing period."*

Last year, many parents' opt-out letters were honored, but just in case, you may also want to send your child to school with a note to read to the test proctor, something like this: "My parent told me not to take this test." Or print that message on a sticker your child can wear on clothing. There's a model sticker at <http://bit.ly/1L8rfDF>

A 2016 memo from Education Commissioner Mitchell Chester says, "We ask principals and test proctors to handle refusals with sensitivity. Students should not be pressured to take the test, nor should they be punished for not taking the test." See <http://bit.ly/refusethetest>.

## How can I make my action have real impact?

One parent quietly opting out will not stop high-stakes testing. It's important to join with other parents and let people know what you are doing and why. Tell your newspaper, parent organizations, school committee, and legislators. Use parent email networks.

**Citizensforpublicschools.org** links to more materials about opting out and the *Less Testing, More Learning* campaign. Please keep us informed of what you are doing. Email [lesstestingmorelearning@gmail.com](mailto:lesstestingmorelearning@gmail.com). We will not release any information without permission.

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