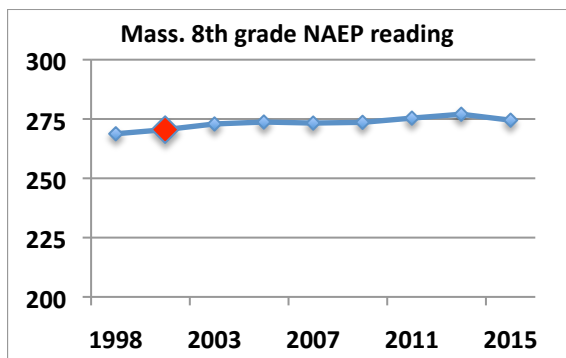


Why it's time to stop 'high-stakes' testing

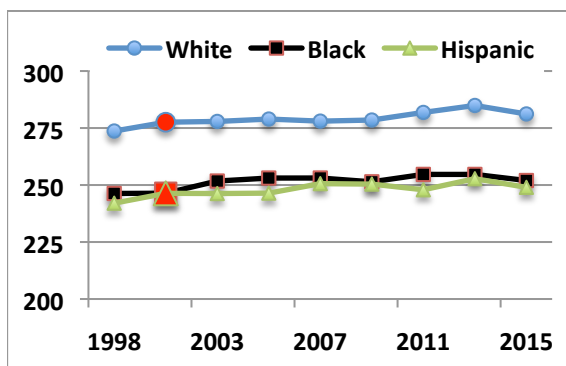
1. It hasn't worked.

High-stakes testing – making major decisions based on standardized tests – has failed.



The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) tests students in grades 4, 8, and 12 for reading and math. In these charts, **red points show 2002** when NCLB took effect. The MCAS graduation requirement began in 2003.

The chart shows high-stakes testing has had no visible impact on the skills measured by standardized tests. Reading scores were rising slowly before NCLB and are still rising slowly.



High-stakes testing was supposed to close achievement gaps among ethnic and racial groups, and between students with disabilities and students without disabilities. It has not.

Math trends, not shown here, tell a similar story. Math scores were rising a bit faster than reading before high-stakes testing and that has continued. Achievement gaps are steady.

United States scores on the international "PISA" tests show no effect, either.

See for yourself: NAEP data for both subjects and all grades are posted at bit.ly/naeptrends. PISA scores are at bit.ly/pisa-us.

2. It hurts students.



High-stakes testing has narrowed the curriculum and forced schools to waste time prepping students for the specific, limited types of questions and formats on the state test.

"Twenty-first century skills" such as problem-solving, teamwork, and creativity have gotten short shrift because there's no time.

History, art, music, drama, and physical education have been cut.

The biggest cutbacks are in schools with large numbers of low-income children and children who are not yet fluent in English. Those schools feel the most pressure to raise scores.

In a Boston Teachers Union survey, most teachers responding said they lose 16 or more days because of testing. That adds up to a full year in a student's career spent on testing instead of learning.

The Boston teachers also said they devoted a quarter or more of their teaching time to test prep.

See for yourself: More survey results are posted at bit.ly/btusurvey.

3. There are better alternatives.



In New York City, a group of 48 high schools has proven the value of performance-based assessments, operating with a waiver from the state Board of Regents. Their student outcomes are far superior to other schools'. **See more** at bit.ly/edweekauthentic and <http://performanceassessment.org>.

New Hampshire has a waiver from the US Department of Education to develop a similar system to replace their state test. **Read more** at education.nh.gov/assessment-systems.

In California, the new "Local Control and Accountability" system allows each district to decide its own goals. **Read more** at bit.ly/lcapfactsheet.



Holy Cross Prof. Jack Schneider has developed an assessment system for Somerville schools that starts with the simple question: What do we want our children to get out of their schools? It includes standardized tests but also a much wider array of measures.

See what he had to say at the State House hearing on testing legislation. There's a link to it at bit.ly/testingtestimony.

In 1993, the Massachusetts legislature voted for a "Massachusetts Comprehensive Assessment System," MCAS. But we never got a comprehensive assessment system. All we got was a Massachusetts Test, which even the Commissioner of Elementary and Secondary Education now says was "never designed to be an indicator of college and career readiness."

Now is the time for a moratorium on high-stakes testing so we can develop a better system that helps each community educate all of its students.

Support the Less Testing, More Learning bills: [H.340](#), [H.418](#), [H.497](#), [S.311](#), [S.257](#), [S.294](#), and [H.3395](#).

These bills would not scrap standardized testing. They would stop the misuse of test scores to penalize students, teachers, schools and districts. That would make it possible for districts to cut out the preparatory tests and lessons whose sole purpose is to improve scores.

Read more at bit.ly/lesstestbills.

Less testing, more learning!

Citizens for Public Schools

Parents, teachers, and other Massachusetts residents working to improve public education for all children.

Visit us at www.citizensforpublicschools.org.



Citizens for Public Schools.



HOW TO ORGANIZE AN OPT-OUT HOUSE PARTY

Before the party:

- Talk to your friends and neighbors who are parents of children in the tested grades. Get at least one other person to join you in sponsoring the party – preferably more.
- Write an invitation, signed by all those sponsoring the party. Make sure to mention you will serve refreshments.
- Ask each sponsor to invite other people to the party personally, one at a time. Individual emails work much better than emails to a group, and a personal talk works much better than an email.
- If you want to open the party to more people, ask each sponsor to put the invitation on Facebook, relevant email lists, and Twitter.

At the party:

- If the people coming don't all know each other, provide name tags.
- Serve refreshments.
- Have everyone introduce themselves, say who their children are and in what grades and school, and why they're thinking of opting their children out.
- Optional: Show the video at <http://bit.ly/optoutvideo>. (Watch it first to see if you think it will help.)
- Pass out copies of the opt-out fact sheet and review it together.
- Ask whether people have had conversations with their own children or with school staff or other parents about testing or about opting out. It's important to get people participating in the discussion. People are unlikely to take action just because they've received information.
- If there are parents from more than one school at your house party, ask parents from each school to plan together what they will do. If there's a school with only one parent there, the first priority is to find more parents. It's very hard to act alone.
- Make specific plans (with deadlines) to:
 - Discuss opting out with your children
 - Inform school officials of your decisions
 - Reach out to other parents
 - Tell local media and social media what you're doing.
 - Create an email list or closed Facebook page for the group.
 - Perhaps organize a public meeting or community forum.
- Decide on a date to meet again, soon enough so you don't lose momentum, but with enough time to carry out many of the plans you've made before your next meeting. Two weeks may be a good interval.

After the party:

- Set up the email group (such as a Google group) or Facebook page.
- Carry out plans. Each person should report what's been done and how it went to the email group or Facebook page.
- Email lesstestingmorelearning@gmail.com or lisa.guisbond@gmail.com to say what happened at your meeting and your next steps.

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Social Media

Sharing on social media about your house party or forum will encourage others to attend/host an event and will help spread the word that parents want Less Testing, More Learning!

Take a photo, tag yourself/others (with permission), write a sentence about why you're opting out, and don't forget to include #MassOptOut #LessTesting. Use these hashtags on Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram so that everyone can see all the amazing events that are happening!

Email your photo to lesstestingmorelearning@gmail.com and we'll post it on our [Opt Out Mass Facebook page](#)

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 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?

Last year, some officials told parents that opting out could hurt their school's state rating. "Level 1" requires 95% test participation. "Level 2" requires 90%.

However, most schools are administering PARCC this spring. **The state has pledged not to lower any school's rating if it gives PARCC.** (Read this promise at <http://bit.ly/harmlesspromise>.) The only exception: The Massachusetts Education Commissioner can still put a school in level 5, in which the state takes control. If your school is not currently at level 4 ("turnaround"), it does not face this danger.

How can I opt out my child?

Send the principal a letter saying you do not want your child to take the state test. It can be as basic as this:

"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 https://actionnetwork.org/user_files/user_files/000/005/822/original/Avery5164OptOutStickers.pdf

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." The memo is at <http://bit.ly/refusetheest>.

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. We will not release any information without your direct permission.



[Principal Name]

[School Name]

[Street Address]

[Town/City]

[Date]

Dear Principal xx,

I wanted to let you know that my child, [name], will not take part in the [name the test] this year. We ask that you make arrangements for him/her to have a productive educational experience during the testing period.

Thank you for all you do. With each year, our child continues to thrive at [school name]. Much of the credit for his/her success, both academically and socially, is due in large part to the excellent work of the teaching and education staff at [school name]. Our decision to opt out is unrelated to anything we've encountered at [school name]. Rather, we feel that there is an overemphasis on standardized testing in today's public schools and we would prefer not to be a part of it this year.

We are grateful to be part of the [school name] community.

Thank you for your assistance on this matter. Please contact me once you've determined how my child will spend his/her time during testing. Having this information in advance will help me prepare my child for school on these days.

Respectfully,

[parent/guardian]

cc: [name of student's teacher]

Student I am a ~~Test Score~~

*Test refusals are a way to protest the misuse
and overuse of standardized tests*

Learn about OPTING OUT Of MCAS and PARCC

- Parents and Students have started a movement to “Opt Out” of standardized tests
- Testing does not improve educational outcomes
- Private companies are making huge profits from testing
- Private companies own these tests, as well as our children’s data
- Testing exacerbates inequities based on race, class, language and disability

Please join us for an informational meeting!

Time and Date: _____

Location _____

RSVP to _____

YOU CAN REFUSE

