

# LESS TESTING MORE LEARNING

#lesstesting

## A Parents' Guide to Opting Out of State Standardized Tests

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### What does it mean to “opt out” of testing?

It means refusing to take a state standardized test, such as PARCC, MCAS or MCAS 2.0.

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### Why should I opt my child out of such tests?

*To protect your child:* For many parents, opting out is the best way to reduce stress in anxious children, including those who are good students but poor test-takers and those who are still learning English.

*To send a message and improve the educational experience for all:* Opting out has become a powerful way to protest the excessive focus on standardized tests in schools throughout our state and country. The overuse of these tests consumes valuable classroom time, leads to a narrowing of the curriculum and diminishes the joy of learning.

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### How will opting out affect my child's grades or academic standing?

There are no state-mandated consequences for students in grades 3-8 based on standardized test results, only for high schools students. In order to graduate, students must pass grade 10 MCAS tests in English language arts and mathematics and a high school science end-of-course MCAS test.

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### Is opting out legal?

Yes. While there are state and federal laws requiring districts to administer these tests, there are no laws requiring students to take them (again, except for the high school graduation requirement).

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

Most students read or are given an alternative educational activity. Here's what Commissioner Mitchell Chester said on this subject in a January 2016 [memo](#):

*“Students should not be pressured to take the test, nor should they be punished for not taking the test. They may sit quietly and read in the testing room, but if they are distracting others in the class who are taking the test, it would be appropriate to have them move to another location in the school with adult supervision. There is no requirement to provide formal or informal instruction to these students during the test period; having them do homework or read a book is sufficient, provided that the material is separate from the content being assessed in the testing room.”*

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### **How will opting out benefit my child?**

For some, the biggest benefit is sparing children from a stressful test. Others gain a valuable life lesson by taking a stand on an issue that is very important to them: the quality of their educational experience.

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### **Does opting out cost my school or district money?**

No. Although parents have been told that schools could lose money, no school anywhere has lost a dime. Last year, 240,000 students — one in five in grades 3 through 8 — opted out in New York state. In some schools, the rate was much higher. Still, no New York schools lost federal or state money. The same is true in other states with much higher opt-out rates than Massachusetts.

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### **Will my school be hurt in other ways?**

That's unlikely. Under current law, a school's accountability "level" can be reduced if the test participation rate drops below 95 percent. In reality, the serious sanctions for schools and educators that stem from being named a Level 4 or 5 school are driven by low test scores — not by low participation rates — and by the commissioner's determination that a school is greatly in need of improvement. It would be bad policy and a waste of valuable resources for the state to intervene in a well-functioning school simply because a lot of parents refused to let their children take a test they believe does more harm than good.

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### **How can I opt out my child?**

Speak to your child's principal in person or send a letter to the principal saying you do not want your child to take the state test. It can be as simple as:

*"I have asked my child, [NAME], not to take part in [NAME TEST] this year. Please arrange for my child to have a productive educational experience during the testing period."*

If your school requires the student to personally refuse the test, give your child a note to read to the proctor that says something like this: "My [mother, father or guardian] told me not to take this test."

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### **What else can I do to support less testing, more learning?**

Spread the word about opting out to other parents. There is strength in numbers. Share your views on testing with your local school committee, local PTA/PTO, school council, local education association and local media. Connect with other parents and educators who share your views through one of the organizations that address this issue, such as the [Massachusetts Education Justice Alliance](#), [Citizens for Public Schools](#), [FairTest](#), [United Opt Out](#) or the [Network for Public Education](#).

*Thanks to Citizens for Public Schools for information that was helpful in producing this guidance.  
The MTA is solely responsible for the contents.*



**For more information, go to [massteacher.org/optout](https://massteacher.org/optout)**

*Massachusetts Teachers Association*