

A Family's Guide to Opting Out of State Standardized Tests

Despite the enormous pressure parents and students are under to participate in high-stakes testing, you have the right to refuse.

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “OPT OUT” OF TESTING?

It means refusing to take a state standardized test, such as MCAS or ACCESS. Typically, parents are the ones opting out their children.

WHY SHOULD I OPT MY CHILD OUT OF SUCH TESTS?

To protect your child. During the pandemic, students have had to adapt to challenges in their lives that have affected their social, emotional and physical health, as well as academic work. Students will need support in all of these areas when they return to in-person school. Schools need time to focus on these student needs; time devoted to testing will make it harder for schools to help students.

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 school 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. Some accommodations for the MCAS graduation requirement have been made due to the pandemic. Seniors both last year and this year are not required to pass any MCAS tests in order to graduate, but the state is planning to reinstate the ELA and math test requirements starting in 2022.

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.

WHAT WILL MY CHILD DO WHILE THE TESTS ARE ADMINISTERED?

Most students read or are given an alternative educational activity. Here's what the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education said on this subject in a [March 2017 memo](#):

“Students who refuse to take the MCAS test may remain in the testing room as long as they are sitting quietly and are not interfering with other students. If a student becomes disruptive, they should be removed from the testing room and placed in a safe location until testing is completed and regular classroom instruction resumes.”

HOW WILL OPTING OUT BENEFIT MY CHILD?

Your child has experienced a drastically different learning environment over the past year. As students return to in-person school, opting your child out of testing will reduce the stress and harm from taking a test that will not yield accurate or useful results. Further, testing children on material they may well have not had the opportunity to learn is unfair. Classroom teachers are best positioned to evaluate the academic progress of your child and discuss how to address any issues that exist.

DOES OPTING OUT COST MY SCHOOL OR DISTRICT MONEY?

No. Although some parents have been told that schools could lose money, no school anywhere has lost any funding due to parents' opting their children out of testing, even in states where the opt-out rates have been high.

WILL MY SCHOOL BE HURT IN OTHER WAYS?

No. Federal and state accountability rules will not be applied this year. Most notably, no schools will be rated and no schools will be identified as low-performing based on state standardized tests.

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."*

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. Contact your legislators and members of Congress to encourage them to take steps to prevent standardized testing this year. 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**.