



February 11, 2016

PTA Leaders, Members and Supporters,

During our January 2016 meeting, National PTA's Board of Directors adopted a new position statement on assessment that was collaboratively developed by National PTA's Legislation Committee with input and insight from volunteers. Collectively, the position statement was shaped by PTA volunteers and elected leadership representing 24 states across the country.

The association last adopted a position statement on student assessment and testing in 1981, thus it has been more than 30 years since PTA addressed the issue. Over the last few years, the use of assessments has increasingly become a prevalent topic of concern. Furthermore, as implementation begins on the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), it is imperative for National PTA to provide new guidance.

We have received positive and negative feedback from some of you as well as external stakeholders on the new position statement, particularly a paragraph that addresses state and district policies that allow students to be opted out of state-mandated assessments. We highly value hearing from you and always welcome your input.

We agree that over emphasis has been placed on testing in recent years, which has resulted in "teaching only to the test" and "narrowing down" the curriculum — activities that have placed a burden on classroom time and denied students a full educational experience. We also agree that test scores have been inappropriately used as a single metric of student achievement, teacher effectiveness and school success.

Speaking up and taking action is a critical step to improve the overall education system and ensure every child has the opportunity to reach his/her full potential. National PTA has always held that it is the right of parents to decide what is best for their children. As PTA's mission is on behalf of all children, and we continue to support parent's rights, it would be contrary to our mission to support or promote a strategy that does not consider the rights or consequences of that strategy for all children.

National PTA does not believe that opting out is an effective strategy to address the frustration over testing. Mass opt-out comes at a real cost to the goals of educational equity and individual student achievement. We strongly advocate for and continue to support increased inclusion of the parent voice in educational decision making at all levels. We remain committed to ensuring parents and families are at the table when policymakers are considering policies that affect students.

When used appropriately, assessments provide much-needed information that is used to guide instruction to better meet the needs of students and ensure necessary resources and supports are provided to improve outcomes for all children. Having annual data is critical to support school improvement efforts, promote equity and make sure every student graduates ready for postsecondary education and the workforce.

If only certain students are tested, it could very well mask the real performance of the nation's public schools. Failing to include all students in the assessment system would mean that some learners would not be counted. As a result, the needs of all students would not be known and their needs would not be met.



With opt out, parents lose a tool in evaluating the progress their child is making each year, teachers lose the ability to assess and correct weak spots in their instructional plans, communities lose the knowledge of whether or not their school is meeting students' needs, and school and state leaders lose the reliable data they depend on to make critical decisions about how to better support students in the future.

It is essential that current challenges are addressed and assessment systems are improved.

National PTA's new position statement acknowledges the importance of eliminating unnecessary, low-quality assessments and not using test results as the sole factor in making educational decisions while protecting the vital role that good assessments play in measuring student progress so parents and educators have the best information to support teaching and learning, improve outcomes and ensure equity for all children.

When read in its entirety, the statement provides a holistic approach to improving assessment systems. We encourage states and districts to conduct audits of their assessment systems to ensure appropriate development, reliability and implementation of high quality assessments. We also urge states and districts to clearly articulate to parents the assessment and accountability system in place at their child's school. Additionally, we outline the need for schools and families to engage in meaningful, two-way communication regarding assessments, including how schools and families can work together to use the data to support student growth and learning. Further, we call for states and districts to annually evaluate and review their assessment systems to certify that they accurately and fairly measure student achievement toward college and career standards and provide valuable and timely data to parents, teachers and school leaders.

Each state and district has unique challenges, but we must work together and be effective stewards of education for all of our nation's children by improving assessment systems. Together, we now have the opportunity to make certain that assessments are executed properly to ensure all students receive a high-quality education that prepares them for long-term success.

Please continue to share with us your questions, concerns, suggestions and input. We want to know your opinions, the issues that are important to you and families in your communities and the challenges you face in advocating for every child.

As we have done for more than 100 years, we must continue to advocate and work together to make a difference for the education, health, safety and well-being of every child and make every child's potential a reality.

Thank you for your support and your commitment to PTA! And thank you for all that you do for our nation's children!

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Laura M. Bay".

Laura Bay
President
National PTA

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Nathan R. Monell".

Nathan R. Monell, CAE
Executive Director
National PTA