



National PTA Assessment Position Statement Guidance for PTA Leaders

This document provides information on the recent adoption of an assessment position statement by the National PTA Board of Directors. PTA leaders are encouraged to use this document to guide their responses to membership, partner organizations and stakeholders concerning the position statement. If you have any questions regarding the position statement, please contact Jacki Ball, director of government affairs for National PTA, at jball@pta.org. In the event media inquiries are received about the statement, please direct them to Heidi May Wilson, manager of media relations for National PTA, at hmay@pta.org.

Rationale for Assessment Position Statement

National PTA adopted a Student Assessment and Testing position statement in 1981. 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 for parents, and movements to opt children out of assessments have gained some momentum. By adopting this position statement, the elected leadership of PTA has embraced an issue that is of concern to many parents, educators and students across the country. While there is not universal agreement on the issue of assessment, National PTA is in alignment with a diverse group of associations and organizations, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Leadership Council on Civil and Human Rights, among many others. Furthermore, as implementation begins on the new Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) it is imperative for National PTA to provide new guidance on assessment.

Development of Assessment Position Statement

Collectively, the position statement was shaped by PTA volunteers and elected leadership representing 24 states across the country. The duly elected leadership--National PTA Board of Directors--thoroughly reviewed and approved the statement at its January 2016 meeting. The national legislation committee and PTA volunteer leadership sought to ensure the language of the position statement is representative of the mission, values and priorities of National PTA. This is why the principles articulated clearly prioritize the needs of *all* students, which includes high-quality instruction, continuous improvement and family-school collaboration. Numerous source materials were consulted on the subject of assessment systems and student participation in the context of the current policy environment, including federal and state statutes and proposed policies and research findings. The Board of Directors and Legislation Committee also carefully accounted for any past or ongoing activity of state PTA congresses on assessment to ensure the resulting language would provide national leadership and guidance and support all students.

What Does the Position Statement Say about Assessment Systems and Student Participation?

National PTA acknowledges the important role that high-quality assessments play in promoting equity, providing parents, teachers and school leaders with valuable information about student growth and

achievement and improving outcomes for all of our nation's children. At the same time, National PTA recognizes the concerns many parents and educators have about the overemphasis on testing and the impact it has on teaching and learning.

Many states are working to implement high-quality assessment systems that seek to provide critical information to parents, students and educators. The position statement provides numerous recommendations on how states and school districts can improve assessments and reduce the amount of required tests. The recommendations include audits of assessment systems to eliminate unnecessary tests; ensure appropriate development, reliability and implementation of high-quality assessments; allow for clear and multiple means of communication and engagement with families on assessment; improve the timeliness and comprehension of assessment results; and provide adequate professional development to educators on the development, use and evaluation of assessments and the data they provide.

National PTA has a long-standing and unaltered position on the use and overreliance of high-stakes, summative assessments as they pertain to student learning and achievement. While the Student Assessment and Testing position statement (1981) was retired with the passage of the new position statement, the new position statement still includes language on National PTA's well-established stance against the use of high-stakes testing.

This new position statement articulates that PTA supports state assessment systems that are appropriately aligned with each state's academic standards. Furthermore, the statement outlines that a sound and comprehensive assessment system should include multiple measures of student growth and achievement that reflect the knowledge and skills students need when they graduate to ensure they are ready for college and the workplace.

National PTA believes assessments are essential to ensure all students receive a high-quality education and help guide instruction to better meet the needs of students. The association maintains that in order to provide the most accurate information to parents, educators, schools, the district and the state all students must participate in state required assessments. The information gathered from assessments helps to make sure students and schools are receiving the necessary resources and supports in order to reach their full potential.

Both the position statement and ESSA acknowledge that states can have policies that provide a mechanism for parents to opt their children out from state-mandated assessments. However, the position statement indicates that National PTA does not support these types of policies. While some state policies allow for opt-out, the association does not believe that opting out is an effective strategy to address the frustration over testing. A blanket, mass opt-out of state-required assessments is not supported by National PTA.

PTA has always held that it is the right of parents to decide what is best for their child. As PTA's mission is on behalf of all children, and we continue to support parent's rights, it would be contrary to the association's mission to support or promote a strategy that does not consider the rights or consequences of that strategy for all children. When parents opt their children out of tests—even for legitimate concerns—they're not only making a choice for their own children, they're inadvertently making a choice that can affect efforts to improve schools for every child.

National PTA has always believed that educational improvements and increased well-being for our nation's children comes from engaged and empowered parents and families. The parent voice is critical in the discussion around educational equity, and we strongly advocate and continue to support increased inclusion of the parent voice in educational decision making at all levels. Parents and families must be at the table when policymakers are considering policies that affect students.

Communicating about the Assessment Position Statement with Members, Partners and other Audiences

- Thirty-three states and the District of Columbia require all students to take state tests (i.e. either do not allow or provide a mechanism to opt-students from state mandated tests)
 1. Alabama
 2. Alaska
 3. Arizona
 4. Arkansas
 5. Connecticut
 6. Delaware
 7. District of Columbia
 8. Florida
 9. Georgia
 10. Hawaii
 11. Illinois
 12. Indiana
 13. Iowa
 14. Kansas
 15. Kentucky
 16. Maryland
 17. Massachusetts
 18. Michigan
 19. Mississippi
 20. Missouri
 21. New Hampshire
 22. New Jersey
 23. New Mexico
 24. New York
 25. North Carolina
 26. Ohio
 27. Rhode Island
 28. South Carolina
 29. Texas
 30. Tennessee
 31. Vermont
 32. Virginia
 33. West Virginia
 34. Wyoming
- Three states – California, Colorado and Oregon – allow opt-out of all state tests. Thirteen states have policies that allow for refusal, opt-out with restrictions or local determination.
- Federal law (both NCLB and ESSA) requires a 95% participation rate in state assessments and schools or districts that do not meet this requirement can face sanctions from the U.S. Department of Education under the General Education Provisions Act (GEPA).
- If only certain students are tested, it could very well mask the real performance of the nation's public schools and have a disparate impact on minorities, students with disabilities and English language learners. 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.
- By allowing students to be opted out of statewide assessments, 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.
- We recognize the frustrations people feel about over-testing and what's happening in schools, and absolutely believe that parents need more and better ways to be heard in decisions. We do not think that opting out is an effective strategy to address those frustrations and believe that it comes at a real cost to the goals of educational equity.

- A 2015 poll by [Education Next](#) found that 67% of respondents support testing students yearly in reading and math, whereas 21% oppose such testing. Furthermore, the poll found that 52% of parents oppose the opt-out concept, while just 32% support it. Among teachers, 57% oppose and 32% support the opt-out movement.
- An August 2014 poll by [Education Post](#) found that 66% of parents support standardized testing, with even higher percentages of support among Latino and African American parents at 79% and 75%, respectively.
- While the annual [PDK/Gallup Poll \(August 2015\)](#) revealed that 67% of public school parents say there is too much emphasis on standardized testing, 59% of them stated they would not opt-out their own child from one or more standardized exams.
- Figures are scant on the extent of parental and student opt-out nationwide, however [Student Testing in America's Great City Schools: An Inventory and Preliminary Analysis](#) found the median of opt-outs was less than one percent in most urban school districts. Of the districts surveyed, most had opt-out rates from 1% to under 2%. The report did identify several districts with higher rates – Rochester, New York (20%); Buffalo, New York (15%); Albuquerque, New Mexico (6%); and Portland, Oregon (3%).
- Full participation in assessments provides complete data sets for educators, school leaders, districts and states. If all students don't participate in assessments, we lose valuable data that identifies where there are disparities in opportunities and outcomes for all students. Furthermore, non-participation can affect the achievement results for the school and misrepresent achievement gaps among various student populations. Non-participation in assessments can disproportionately affect the students who are in greatest need of additional academic and non-academic supports and further exacerbate resource inequities that currently exist.
- We must include all children. This principle applies in the Census and elsewhere, you need to be counted – and visible – in order to be heard. Allowing schools to not be accountable for all children (e.g. children with disabilities or English learners) by opting them out of assessments, or encouraging them to not participate means that their needs are less likely to be met.
- According to the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), at least 39 states already have taken steps to work with educators at the state and local levels to address over testing by reviewing all tests administered to students and making sure they are of high quality and meaningful. The conversation around the amount and types of assessments students take is an important conversation and parents must be at the table as these discussions are occurring at the state and local levels. However, completely opting out of tests is not the solution to the challenges communities face.
- Results from high-quality assessment give teachers a robust reading of every student's aptitude, allowing them to spend less time analyzing students' progress and more time on figuring out how to support their students' learning. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is [committed](#) to ensuring states have high-quality assessments and has also produced a [document](#) to support the appropriate selection and evaluation of high-quality assessments.

- High-quality assessments measure the knowledge and skills that are part of regular classroom instruction such as asking students to think critically, analyze information, and explain their answers.

Related Resources and Research

- [U.S. Department of Education Dear Colleague Letter to Reduce and Improve Testing](#) (February 2, 2016)
- [U.S. Department of Education Dear Colleague letter on assessment participation rates](#) (December 22, 2015)
- [Opt Out Policies by State](#), National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)
- [Responding to Opt Out Requests: The Opportunity for State Boards](#), NASBE
- Opt Out Guidance State by State, NASBE (included at the end of this document)
- [Knowing the Score: The Who, What, and Why of Testing](#), Center on Education Policy
- [State Opt Out Legislation in 2015](#), National Conference of State Legislatures
- [Civil Rights Groups: “We Oppose Anti-Testing Efforts”](#)
- [Testing Provides Critical Information](#), Phi Delta Kappa
- [Why civil rights groups say parents who opt out of tests are hurting kids](#), The Washington Post
- [Student Testing in America’s Great City Schools: An Inventory and Preliminary Analysis](#), Council of the Great City Schools
- [Testing Overload in America’s Schools](#), Center for American Progress (CAP)
- [Implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act: Toward a Coherent, Aligned Assessment System](#), CAP
- [The 47th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public’s Attitudes Toward the Public Schools](#)
- [The 2015 EdNext Poll on School Reform: Public thinking on testing, opt out, common core, unions, and more](#)
- [Education Post Poll: National attitudes around education issues, improvements and institutions](#)
- [Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts](#), Achieve
- [Comprehensive Statewide Assessment Systems: A Framework for the Role of the State Education Agency in Improving Quality and Reducing Burden](#), Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)
- [Assessment Quality Principles](#), (CCSSO)
- [Criteria for High-Quality Assessments](#), (CCSSO)

Partial List of Organizations that also Support Full Student Participation in State Assessments

The American Association of University Women (AAUW)
 Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)
 Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)
 Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc. (COPAA)
 Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)
 Education Trust
 The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights
 League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)
 NAACP
 National Council of La Raza (NCLR)
 National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)
 National Urban League (NUL)
 Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)
 TASH
 The U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Additional Resource:



Opt Out Guidance State by State

August 2015

State	Policy Description
Alabama	Students may not opt out or be opted out of state tests according to state law. The state superintendent of education has offered guidance in two memos issued to city and county superintendents. The first, from the 2013-14 school year , directs school administrators to provide parents requesting opt outs with a copy of state code. The second, released in February 2015 , offers additional clarity on state policy addressing testing requirements.
Alaska	Opt outs are not permitted by state law. The state has provided several parent resources on its website, including documents that clarify state and federal policy and outline the ways state tests can benefit students and schools.
Arizona	State law requires all students to take state standardized tests; student scores are factored into state accountability determinations. “A Parent’s Guide to Understanding AIMS 3-8” refers parents to state and federal law, both of which require testing, and the state attorney general has provided two letters (here and here) clarifying state assessment policy and parents’ opt out requests.
Arkansas	Opt outs are not permitted by state law and all students are required to take standardized tests. An FAQ section on the Arkansas Department of Education website states that students who choose not to participate in state tests are subject to the same consequences they would have faced had they failed to achieve a proficient score on those tests. Any student who fails to demonstrate proficient achievement on state standardized tests is required to participate in an individual academic improvement plan.
California	Opt outs are permitted if a parent or guardian provides a written request to the school. However, the state education agency cautions that students excused from state tests are still counted toward schools’ 95 percent participation rate, and schools may face federal consequences if less than 95 percent of their students take state tests. School districts must provide “easily understood” information describing the nature and purpose of state assessments, and parents must renew their opt out requests each year. The California Department of Education maintains ongoing communications with district superintendents and testing coordinators about any changes or issues that arise related to opt out policy.
Colorado	Districts are required to adopt policies that allow parents to

	excuse their children from state tests. In February 2015, the state board passed a motion stating that school districts would not be punished if less than 95 percent of students participated in assessments, but the US Department of Education responded in a letter that the board could not grant that immunity.
Connecticut	Opt outs are not permitted by state law. The state education agency has provided guidance on how schools can respond to parent opt out requests and distributed a sample letter districts can use when addressing parent inquiries.
Delaware	Opt outs are not permitted by state law. Delaware released a two- page brief summarizing all relevant state and federal legislation. The governor vetoed a bill to permit opt outs on July 15, 2015.
District of Columbia	Opt outs are not permitted. The district’s education agency responds to parent inquiries on an individual basis and has provided information on its website explaining why assessments are useful .
Florida	Opt outs are not permitted by state law. If students do not participate in assessments, districts are required to provide parents information outlining the implications of nonparticipation. The Florida Department of Education responds to opt out inquiries with a copy of a detailed letter from the state commissioner of education. The letter explains why opt outs are not permitted and why state assessments are important and required.
Georgia*	State officials did not respond to attempts to confirm Georgia opt out information. A state assessment manual notes that federal and state laws require all students to participate in state assessments and outlines consequences of nonparticipation. If a student does not take a state test, they receive the same consideration as they would have had they received a “zero” score. Grade retention is a potential consequence, and parents must meet with school officials to determine whether their child will move on to the next grade. The assessment manual instructs districts to notify parents and students of testing dates, the purpose of the tests, and how results will be used.
Hawaii	Opt outs are not permitted. The state education agency has informed district officials that students may refuse to take state assessments but that would not exempt them from consequences of nonparticipation.
Idaho	Opt out policy is up to districts. The state does not allow or disallow opting out. Schools remain responsible for meeting the federally mandated 95 percent participation minimum, and the state has released guidance that explains why standardized tests are important and suggests ways for schools to inform local communities about assessment mandates.
Illinois	Students may not opt out of state tests . The Illinois State Board of Education has released several letters on its website offering

	guidance to schools and informing families of state test participation policy.
Indiana	Opt outs are not permitted under state law. In the state’s 2014-2015 assessment program manual , the state education agency clarifies that although state and federal law do not ban parents from refusing to let their students take standardized tests, opt outs are not permitted, and parents who do not send their children to school on testing days with the intent of excluding them from tests are violating state school attendance laws. Students must take state tests to graduate or be promoted from the third grade, and schools with lower than 95 percent student participation may see their performance and improvement grades suffer.
Iowa	Students may not opt out of state tests . The Iowa Department of Education will release opt out guidance in its annual letter to district superintendents in late August or early September. State code prevents students from opting out of state assessments so that officials can avoid using skewed data to determine changes in achievement gaps. Local districts may determine the consequences of nonparticipation in state tests.
Kansas	Students may only be excused from state tests for medical reasons or severe family situations, not in response to parental requests. Districts are responsible for informing schools and parents of state testing mandates.
Kentucky	Students may not opt out of state tests and may only be excused for medical reasons or extraordinary circumstances. Students who refuse to take state assessments receive “zero” scores. The state education agency provided links to guidance for districts, schools, and parents in a March 2015 newsletter.
Louisiana	There is no opt out provision in state law. The only state response to date is an executive order issued in January 2015 by Governor Bobby Jindal that cites existing legislation stipulating that students who do not take tests will receive “zero” scores. There are no other procedures for nonparticipation.
Maine	Students may sit out of standardized tests , but they are not shielded from the consequences of nonparticipation. Local districts have the authority to include state tests as an element of their high school graduation requirements.
Maryland	Students may not be opted out of state tests. Parents may send their children to public or private schools but may not selectively choose or reject certain elements of the public education program. The state education agency has not released any specific guidance or communications to parents or schools.
Massachusetts	Opt outs are not permitted . If a parent submits a written refusal, principals are asked to counsel them on the benefits of state testing. If a parent still refuses to allow their child to take state tests and would otherwise keep their child home from school,

	principals are asked to work with the parent and find a way to keep the child in school during testing. Students are required to pass state assessments to graduate.
Michigan	Opt outs are not permitted . Michigan has released resources for parents and schools, including a letter from the state superintendent and an official position memo .
Minnesota	Parents may refuse to let their children take standardized tests. However, students enrolled in eighth grade during or before the 2011-12 school year must pass state tests in order to graduate high school. The state testing procedures manual notes that the federal 95 percent participation mandate is still enforced and encourages districts to provide transparent information about the potential consequences of testing refusals.
Mississippi	State law requires all students to take standardized tests. The state education agency advises districts of the importance of state testing and provides guidance on what to tell parents who request opt outs. If parents refuse to let their children participate, their children may sit out, but that practice is not promoted or endorsed. District superintendents are trained on state testing policies at various meetings and conferences and were sent a letter by the state superintendent in lieu of the national attention on opt outs this year.
Missouri	Opt outs are not permitted under state law. Students are required to take standardized tests by state and federal mandates, and local districts are required to establish their own policies regarding student participation in state tests. The state education agency offers an explanation of state policy in a legislative Q&A accessible through their website.
Montana	The state recommends that all students take standardized tests but ultimately allows local districts to determine opt out policy. If a district decides not to accept opt out requests, it may determine appropriate consequences for students who refuse to participate in state assessments. The state board of education is expected to decide whether state law requires assessment participation by January 2016.
Nebraska	Parents may refuse to allow their children to take state tests. If a student does not take a standardized test, they receive a “zero” score. In order to excuse their children from state testing, parents must make an official request. Districts are encouraged to meet with parents and counsel them on the benefits of allowing their children to participate in state assessments.
Nevada	Schools may allow opt outs at their own discretion. State laws are silent on whether opt outs are a possibility in Nevada, and the state board does not provide guidance. The office of the state superintendent does not prohibit opting out of criterion-referenced tests, but students cannot graduate if they do not take and pass end-of-course exams. Since state and federal laws

	require participation in standardized assessments, districts have been advised that they may face any consequences associated with low test participation rates.
New Hampshire	Opt outs are prohibited . Students are not penalized for nonparticipation, but districts incur lower participation rates, which are publicly released. Decisions regarding graduation or grade retention based on refusal to take state tests are made at the local level.
New Jersey*	Students may not opt out of state tests. New Jersey notes that all students are required to take standardized assessments according to state and federal law. The state board of education has confirmed that all districts must implement the Common Core and corresponding tests. If students refuse to take tests, schools are not required to provide alternatives. The state education agency has encouraged school administrators to ensure that their district's discipline and attendance policies are implemented accordingly in cases of nonparticipation. Administrators are also encouraged to counsel parents considering opt outs and inform them of the positive outcomes of state test participation.
New Mexico*	Opt outs are prohibited . Students may only be excused from standardized assessments if they have a medical exemption. An FAQ document explains why students must take standardized tests and notes potential consequences for students who do not participate, such as lack of fulfillment of graduation requirements. The state education agency has made many public resources available. Another can be found here .
New York	Opt outs are not permitted, and all students are expected to take state tests . If parents withhold their children from school during testing, the absences will be managed in accordance with existing attendance policies. Schools are not required to provide alternate activities for students who refuse to participate in standardized testing.
North Carolina	Opt outs are not permitted. The state's Test Coordinators' Policy Handbook provides a sample letter that can be sent to parents who request to opt their children out of standardized tests. The handbook also notes that scores on state-mandated end-of- course exams are factored into students' grades.
North Dakota	Opt outs are permitted by a silent policy that is not often exercised. The state superintendent has informed schools of the potential consequences of opt outs, and schools are encouraged to counsel parents who request opt outs from state tests. This is not a formal policy but a best-practice consideration. Schools are responsible for informing parents of opt out policy.
Ohio	Opt outs are not permitted under state law. Ohio released a document explaining the benefits of state tests and the potential consequences of nonparticipation.

Oklahoma	Parents are not prohibited from withdrawing their children from state testing, but the state education agency advises that nonparticipation could have negative impacts. School districts have the right to create an opt out option, but that is not encouraged or recognized by the state. According to state law, students who are in school within the standardized testing window will be provided the test. The state has provided districts guidance on opt out policy and has suggested ways districts can respond to parents who refuse testing or request more information about state tests.
Oregon	Current law allows students to be excused from assessments based on medical reasons, disabilities, or religious reasons. A law that will take effect in January 2016 allows parents to excuse their children from standardized tests and requires districts to notify them of that right. The state education agency is developing implementation tools and resources for districts.
Pennsylvania	Opt outs are permitted based on religious reasons . Parents have a right to review state assessments at their child’s school and decide whether those assessments conflict with their religious beliefs. Districts may not refuse opt out requests based on religious beliefs. Students must either pass the state’s Keystone Exam or participate in project-based assessment in order to graduate high school.
Rhode Island	Opt outs are not permitted , and the state education agency expects all students to participate in standardized tests. Local districts may set their own consequences for nonparticipation, and high school students who do not take state tests may face obstacles to graduation.
South Carolina	Opt outs are not permitted. All students must take state standardized tests, according to state law. The state education agency released a memo to all district superintendents in 2014 clarifying state testing policy.
South Dakota	The state has no policy on opt outs. According to state law, public schools must test all students, and the state’s accountability workbook notes that federal law requires 95 percent student participation. Local districts are responsible for creating their own policies to address opt out requests or parent refusals. The state sent school districts an internal memo offering guidance.
Tennessee	Opt outs and testing refusals are not permitted. Tennessee requires student participation in state standardized tests, and local education agencies are not permitted to offer alternate activities for students who refuse. The state education agency released a memo clarifying opt out policy to schools in April 2015.
Texas	Parents are not entitled to excuse their children from state standardized tests, according to state law. The state education

	agency advises districts and schools to direct parents to state policy in answer to any questions.
Utah*	Opt outs are permitted under state law . The state education agency says students will be assigned other tasks if their parents opt them out of state tests. However, parents may not excuse their students from all state assessments. The state education agency has provided a list of tests that all students must take.
Vermont	Opt outs are not permitted ; if a parent refuses to let their child take state tests, the child will receive a “zero” score. Local education agencies must comply with this policy or may face fiscal implications. The Vermont Agency of Education has addressed opt out questions on several occasions in its newsletter .
Virginia	All students are required to take standardized tests. There is no opt out policy, but there is a state policy to address parent or student testing refusals. If a parent refuses to allow their child to participate, they will be informed that their child will receive a “zero” score. Schools are encouraged to request a written refusal to keep in students’ files. Student refusals are coded so they will not be factored into school evaluations, but refusals may still affect students’ ability to meet graduation requirements. The state education agency has released two memos (here and here) addressing opt outs.
Washington	Refusals are permitted but not encouraged . State law requires schools to make state assessments available to all students but does not require schools to make students sit for state tests. School districts must report test participation rates to the state and are asked to create local refusal forms for parents and students to complete and sign if they choose not to take state tests. Completed forms are filed by local districts only. State law does require students to take and pass certain assessments in order to graduate.
West Virginia	Opt outs are not permitted. According to an assessment participation manual , all students are required to take state tests. West Virginia sent internal guidance and information to local education agencies.
Wisconsin	Parents may excuse their children from tests administered in grades 4, 8, and 9-11. State law requires all students to take tests administered in other grades. New opt out language in a recently passed budget requires school districts to notify parents of their opt out rights. The state education agency is preparing guidance in response to that new opt out language.
Wyoming	Opt outs are not permitted . Districts have been encouraged to help parents understand the benefits of state tests and the consequences of nonparticipation.

* State did not respond to NASBE inquiries.