Opting Out of the NYS ELA & Math Assessments:
FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Q: Will opting out hurt my child’s school?
A: No, opting out will not hurt the school. Students who opt out are scored as a “refusal,” not a zero, so it does not lower the school’s scores.

Q: I’ve heard that if a large number of students opt out, our school could lose money or even be taken over by the state. Is this true?
A: No, absolutely not. Many rumors are circulating about the potential consequences of opting out. These are scare tactics. No school in the city or state has faced sanctions for having high percentages of opt outs. Several schools in NYC had significant numbers of students opt out last year and a number of schools across the state had more than 60% of students opt out. We know of no negative repercussions for these schools.

Schools that receive federal Title I funds are expected to have 95% of their students participate in the state tests. But even if they don’t, NO Title I funding will be withheld. The worst possible scenario is that a school could be required to set aside a small part of its Title I funds for specific uses for struggling students. But to date, this has not happened and is not likely to. A parent guide* released by the NYC Department of Education (DOE) states: “no intervention would ever be made solely on the basis of the State test participation rate.”

Q: Is it true that if high-performing children opt out of the tests, it will lower the evaluation scores of the teachers?
A: When a child refuses to take the test, it does not disadvantage the teacher (or principal). The 20% of a teacher’s evaluation that is based on student test scores is a measure of growth – it takes into account changes in student scores from one year to the next. Because of the way the growth score is calculated, it does not matter whether your child is a strong or struggling student. In fact, the highest-performing students have little room for improvement and may not necessarily help, and could potentially hurt, a teacher’s score.

It is not helpful to speculate about which students should or should not opt out in order to protect teachers’ evaluations. The bottom line is that the current teacher evaluation system is flawed. Opting out in large numbers is the most powerful way for parents to let policymakers know that we do not want our children, teachers and schools evaluated based on standardized test scores.

Q: Will opting out jeopardize my child's promotion or put her at risk for being sent to summer school?
A: Up until last year, promotion to the next grade in NYC was based on state test scores. That’s no longer the case: state law now specifies that standardized test scores cannot be the sole or even primary criterion for promotion. Promotion is based on the teacher’s assessment of whether your child is ready for the next grade.

If there is any question about promoting a child, the teacher creates a portfolio with samples of the student’s work. There is also a very short test called the “Blackline Master” which the school might administer (schools have some discretion about when to use this test); the results become part of the portfolio which is reviewed by the principal and superintendent.

Although some principals are telling parents that their child must attend summer school if they do not take the state tests, this is simply not true. If the principal threatens your child with any negative consequences for opting out, refer him or her to the DOE Parent Guide.* If that is not effective, contact Change the Stakes at changesthestakes@gmail.com.

Q: Will opting out interfere with my child’s admission to a screened middle or high school?

A: State test scores can be one factor schools use for admissions, but they cannot be the sole or primary criterion – this is now state law. Our understanding is that every middle and high school is required to have an admissions rubric approved by the DOE. The rubric specifies how much weight is assigned to each admissions factor, such as test scores, grades, attendance, essays and interviews. The rubric must also include admissions procedures for students without state test scores. Any school should be able to tell you what their admissions criteria are, including how they handle admissions for kids without scores.

Q: My child has an IEP and I’m concerned that the tests would be extraordinarily stressful for him. Can I opt out of the tests and still have him fulfill his IEP?

A: Yes, any student may opt out of the state tests. There is no connection between your child’s IEP and the state tests.

Q: I have decided to opt my child out. What do I need to do?

A: Notify the principal in writing that you intend to “refuse” the tests on behalf of your child. You can find a sample letter here, https://changethestakes.wordpress.com/testing-info/how-to-opt-out-of-state-standardized-tests/.

The DOE Parent Guide* instructs principals to respect parents’ wishes to opt out and to make every attempt to engage non-testing students in a meaningful educational activity during testing periods. Check in with the principal and teacher before the tests begin to confirm the arrangements for testing days.

Q: If we refuse the tests, will my child have to take the make up?

A: No, make-up exams are only for children who were absent during the testing period. If you have any concerns about whether the school will respect your opt out request, make it clear that you are refusing the make-up tests as well.

Q: What if my principal tells me that I am not allowed to refuse the tests or pressures me to have my child take the test?

A: Many teachers and principals are supportive of students and parents opting out, but some are not. If you have difficulty, refer your principal to the DOE Parent Guide.* If that is not effective, contact Change the Stakes at changesthestakes@gmail.com and we will try to help.

Contact Change the Stakes at changesthestakes@gmail.com if you have other questions. You can also post questions on Facebook at NYC Opt Out, https://www.facebook.com/groups/nycoptout/.

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