

Opt Out FAQ April 2015

What is "opting out"?

"Opting out" is actively choosing, by notifying your school in writing, that your child will not take the state assessment tests in ELA and Math in early April.

What do people hope to gain by opting their kids out of state testing?

There are two broad areas parents hope to affect by opting their kids out:

1. Parents hope to reduce the amount of test prep done in school and increase the amount of authentic, project-based learning.
2. Parents hope to reduce the weight of standardized tests in teacher evaluations, so that teachers are incented to teach critical thinking, cultivate curiosity, and inspire creativity, rather than drilling kids with test prep.

Why are people opting their kids out?

There are multiple reasons why parents are opting their kids out of the state mandated ELA and Math assessments.

- Teacher assessments are based on the results of these tests and the recently passed state budget could possibly increase the weight of these tests to 50% of a teacher's annual assessment. Many feel that this percentage is too high.
- Basing teacher evaluations on these tests causes teachers to "teach to the test" as teachers can be fired if they do not show improvement year over year. This greatly narrows the curriculum and dumbs down education to "test prep."
- The test questions are never revealed to the students, to teachers, to school districts. Teachers cannot use the tests to understand student strengths and weaknesses.
- Significant percentages of test questions are reportedly several academic years in advance of the grade being tested. This often results in students feeling that they "failed" the test and be stressed and demoralized about their own worthiness.
- The "cut scores" that determine passing and failing the test are not meaningful. They are based on ensuring that a specific percentage of students fail. [Click here for details on cut score determination.](#)

How do you opt out?

It is as simple as sending an email to your child's teacher and the school principal stating, "My child, (your child's name), will not be taking the state assessments."

See below for the "opt out form" which you can print, fill out and submit to your school principal and child's teacher.

What do kids do during the tests if they have opted out?

In North Shore, kids who opt out will go to a separate room (from the test takers) and be allowed to read or draw during the testing time. You could also allow your child to stay home during the testing hours as long as you have notified the school and teacher in writing that your child is opting out of the test (and not simply absent from school).

How will opting out affect my child academically?

The state tests do not relate to any academic or other services that your child might get at school. The state tests are for the evaluation of the teachers. Because no one at our schools will ever see

the test questions, the results cannot be used to identify strengths and weaknesses. The tests are for evaluating teachers.

Will opting out make my kid no eligible for extra help, academic intervention or other services?

No. Extra help, academic intervention and other services are based on benchmarking and other school and district specific evaluations.

North Shore Superintendent Ed Melnick addressed this explicitly at the March 12, 2015 Board meeting ([click here for complete coverage of his remarks](#)). Dr. Melnick stated,

“the state only requires that districts provide AIS to students who receive a "1" on a state assessment, but that the district would offer AIS "to every student we believe needs it" regardless of their score on the exams or whether they sat for them. He also said that opting out of the tests would not affect a child's placement in the enrichment program.”

How will opting out affect my kid's teacher?

Teachers are not penalized for students opting out of the test. In fact, if enough of a teacher's students opt out, then the tests cannot be used as part of that teacher's evaluation as there will not be enough data. This would create a situation where the state would have to create a different evaluation system that is more balanced, which is what the opt-out movement is striving for.

Why can't my teacher, principal, superintendent or school board tell me to opt out?

The state has specifically told public educators that they cannot issue statements encouraging parents to opt their children out of state tests. This is very much a battle and the state, specifically Governor Cuomo, is using all the power it has to get their way. Parents can write letters, make phone calls and opt their children out of the tests. The [North Shore Board of Education did adopt a Resolution on High Stakes Testing](#), that states, in part,

“RESOLVED that the NORTH SHORE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT calls on Governor Cuomo, Commissioner King, the State Legislature, and the Board of Regents to reexamine public school accountability systems in this state, including the Annual Professional Performance Review (APPR) and to develop a system based on multiple forms of assessment which does not require extensive standardized testing, more accurately reflects the broad range of student learning, and is used to support students and improve schools; and

RESOLVED, that the NORTH SHORE CENTRAL SCHOOL DISTRICT calls on the U.S. Congress and Administration to overhaul the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (currently known as the “No Child Left Behind Act”), reduce the testing mandates, promote multiple forms of evidence of student learning and school quality in accountability, and not mandate any fixed role for the use of student test scores in evaluating educators.”

NYS Test Refusal Form 2015

Grades 3-8

_____ I would like my child not to participate in the NYS English Language Arts Assessment.

_____ I would like my child not to participate in the Mathematics Assessment.

_____ I would like my child not to participate in any field test Assessment.

Grades 4 and 8 (in addition to the choices above)

_____ I would like my child not to participate in the NYS Science Assessment.

I ask that the school provide an alternate location and activity for my child, along with the other children who have refused, during the test administration sessions.

Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Student name:

Grade: _____

School: _____

Parent/Guardian

name: _____

Parent/Guardian signature:

Date: _____