

## **Student Participation in New York State Assessments (Grades 3-8)**

### **Frequently Asked Questions**

**Q1. How are the State test results used?**

A1. State assessments help to evaluate each student’s mastery of content and skills in specific subject areas. The scores are analyzed in schools over the summer and as the school year begins to plan instruction for students. As a District, they help us to measure progress by students and schools toward meeting achievement goals. They are one tool—along with student work on assignments, projects, essays, and classroom assessments—that give teachers important information about where students are on their path towards college and careers.

**Q2. Is there a provision for parents to opt their children out of State tests?**

A2. With the exception of certain areas in which parental consent is required, such as Committee on Special Education (CSE) evaluations for students with disabilities, **there is no provision in the State law or regulations that allows parents to opt their children out of State tests or request an alternative evaluation.**

**Q3. What should parents do if they are interested in opting their children out of the State exams?**

A3. Meet with your child’s Principal right away to discuss your concerns. The Principal may want to explain that a student’s test scores are only one of a number of factors that evaluate his or her progress, and describe the potential impact of opting out to the school and District.

**Q4. Will children or their teachers be penalized for opting out of the exams?**

A4. If parents still want to opt their child out of the exams after consulting with the Principal, the school will respect the decision and work to the best of its ability to provide the child with an alternate educational activity (such as quiet reading) during testing times. The parent and the Principal should maintain a written record of this conversation. There will be no disciplinary consequence for students who opt out or for their teachers.

**Q5. Will the District be negatively affected if students opt out?**

A5. Under State and federal accountability rules, the District and individual schools can receive poor ratings if a significant number of students refuse to take the state assessments. Whether the reason is absence or refusal, if less than 95% of a school’s students take the math or ELA assessments, the school is designated as failing to make “Adequate Yearly Progress” (AYP) for that school year. The school will also fail to show progress if one or more subgroups of students fall short of participation requirements (e.g., less than 95% of black students, less than 95% of students with disabilities, etc.)

Under the accountability system, failure to show adequate yearly progress means that:

- Existing Priority and Focus schools—schools that are identified as the lowest performing by the State—cannot be removed from this negative status.

- A school that has been “In Good Standing” can be identified as a Local Assistance Plan (LAP) school if it fails to meet AYP targets for three consecutive years for any subgroup of students. LAP schools are generally subject to additional reporting and self-review requirements.
- Schools cannot achieve “Reward school” status, which highlights high performance or high progress relative to other schools in the State.

**Q6. Are the consequences for opting out the same in suburban districts?**

A6. Yes, but accountability status is less of an issue in most suburban districts. Rochester is designated as a “Focus District,” one of the lowest in the State for student achievement. We have 41 schools designated as Priority or Focus status in 2014-15, 10 In Good Standing and one Local Assistance Plan school. These ratings mean that Rochester schools receive a high level of attention and concern from state and federal regulators, and they make it more urgent that we demonstrate improvement.

**Q7. Is there specific language parents must use to opt out of the State tests?**

A7. With the exception of certain areas in which parental consent is required, there is no formal provision allowing parents to opt their children out of State tests. If you are considering opting your child out of the State tests, please speak with your child’s principal about the implications of not participating in advance of the test dates.

**Q8. What happens during test administration if a student is absent?**

A8. If a student is absent during test administration, the school will administer the test during the make-up period. If a student is also absent then, he or she will not be tested.

**Q9. What score is recorded if a student refuses to participate in State testing?**

A9. Students who opt out will not receive a score, similar to students who were present for the tests but did not respond to any questions or for students whose exams were invalidated by an administrative error.

**Q10. Aren’t we contributing to the culture of over-testing our children?**

A10. The District worked with our bargaining units to reduce by more than two-thirds the number of additional tests previously used for teacher and Principal evaluations. The requirement for students in grades 3 to 8 to take a standardized ELA and math test each year has been in place for more than a decade. As long as students try hard and do their best, the tests are a useful tool to help assess student progress and guide instruction. We hope that the tests do not cause undue stress for students, families, or staff.

**Q11. How do State test results impact teacher and principal ratings?**

A11. In accordance with State law, student performance on State tests is one of multiple measures that will be included in teachers’ and Principals’ annual professional performance review ratings.