

Testing opt-out/Refusal guide for Oregon

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List of Assessments

OAKS: 3rd Grade – 8th Grade and High School

The Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills is aligned to Oregon state standards, which define what students should learn each year. OAK tests are given as follows:

3rd and 6th Grades: OAKS tests in reading and math.

4th and 7th Grades: OAKS tests in reading, math, and writing.

5th and 8th Grades: OAKS tests in reading, math, and science.

10th Grade: OAKS tests in reading, math, writing, and science.

In fifth, eighth, and tenth grades, schools may also give an optional OAKS social studies assessment.

The OAKS Online system is used for reading, math, science, and social studies tests. OAKS Online is a computer-based adaptive test, which means it self-adjusts during test-taking in response to each individual student's performance. Paper and pencil tests are also available and used for some exams, such as the OAKS writing test.

Oregon uses a balanced range of assessments to promote learning for all students. OAKS Extended Assessments are designed to measure the progress of students with cognitive disabilities who require special accommodations. Students who are identified as English Language Learners take the English Language Proficiency Assessment (ELPA), which measures their progress in English language acquisition.

Oregon also participates annually in the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), known as the Nation's Report Card, where a sampling of students (from grades 4, 8, and/or 12) are tested in several content areas as part of a nationally representative assessment of student performance.

See link <http://www.ode.state.or.us/search/results/?id=169>

Special considerations for the above assessments

Oregon has partnered with American Institutes for Research to create an [online testing system](#) that will assess students' mastery of Oregon content standards. This OAKS Online system is available in mathematics, reading/literature, science and social sciences.

Oregon -- with the other Governing States and Smarter Balanced staff -- are implementing the summative, interim, and formative assessment for mathematics and

English language arts beginning in the 2014-2015 school year. Through the 2013-2014 school year Oregon students' OAKS assessments will continue to be based on the 2003 English Language Arts content standards and 2007/2009 Mathematics content standards.

Procedures for opt-out/refusal

Send a letter to your child's teacher and principal stating you are opting out of state testing for reasons of disability or religious belief. "Religion" can be construed broadly and you do not need to invoke a particular tradition or denomination. Suggest an "alternative learning activity" for your child to do during testing time, such as reading, researching, writing, helping younger students, etc. Note that non-tested students may not stay in the testing room while tests are underway.

If your child is in high school and opting out of the 11th grade OAKS assessment, he or she will need an alternative assessment in order to graduate, such as the ACT, SAT, or a locally scored work sample. Be prepared to state your preferred option. If your child is not in high school, no other alternative assessment is required.

You do not need to send a letter to your district, but you may want to call your district just to verify that they share your understanding. Try to make this process as easy on the school teachers and principals as possible by getting all the most accurate information for your district. There should be a "testing coordinator" or someone who works in "assessments" at the district level that can also answer any questions. Make sure your child wants to do this. Don't apply any pressure.

Urgency for opt-out/refusal

High stakes testing fosters test score-driven education rather than meeting the individual needs of students.

The tested subjects become the focus of instruction to boost scores, leading to neglect of useful and enriching subjects such as music, art, shop class, even writing.

The tests favor middle class students and disadvantage low-income and minority students and students limited in English proficiency. As a result, disadvantaged students suffer a narrowed curriculum and are denied access to subjects that might engage them in school. Investing money towards testing, new tests, and data collection diverts money away from providing a quality, well-rounded education for all students. That is money that could be used to lower class sizes, provide counselors and aides, and more time for teachers to interact with parents and students.

High stakes tests fuel push-outs, drop-outs and the school-to-prison pipeline.

Opt out to have a say in public education. Top-down mandates from federal and state policies have left the public, and the people most directly impacted – students, teachers,

and parents - out of public education policy decisions. Opting out is a way to have your voice heard.

Sample language to include in opt-out/refusal

Sample Opt Out Letter

Dear _____:

I am writing on behalf of _____ to opt him/her out of the (test name). He/she is neither permitted to take the exam during mandated testing days nor during designated make-up sessions. Additionally, I am requesting that the school make accommodations for meaningful alternative activities or assignments that will continue to promote his/her academic and intellectual growth. My child will not be in attendance if academically viable alternatives are not available. Furthermore, I must be guaranteed in writing that whatever option is taken, either alternative assignments or absence, my child will not face any negative consequences to, for example, course grades, social or behavioral evaluations, workload, promotion, or future classroom assignments.

Strict adherence to state and federal high-stakes standardized testing, including the extensive classroom preparation that occurs prior to test administration, prevents my child from receiving a well-rounded and engaging educational experience. Until focus on testable skills diminishes to a reasonable extent, I will continue to withhold my child from participation in the testing program, and I ask that you honor that decision.

I do apologize in advance for the inconvenience or scrutiny that this decision may cause the administration, the school, and staff.

Sincerely,

Resources and organizations

United Opt Out www.unitedoptout.com

Fair Test www.fairtest.org

Rethinking Schools www.rethinkingschools.org

Opt Out Supporters:

<http://parentsacrossamerica.org/parents-america-statement-support-portland-student-test-boycott/>

<http://portlandstudentunion.wordpress.com/>

State specific watch-list

ALEC http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Oregon_ALEC_Politicians

Teach for America <http://www.teachforamerica.org/search/node/oregon>

Oregon for Education Reform

<http://www.studentsfirst.org/page/group/OregonforEducationReform>

Additional or miscellaneous information

<http://portlandstudentunion.wordpress.com/2013/02/03/addressing-the-concerns-and-frequently-asked-questions-of-the-standardized-testing-boycott/#more-148>

FAQ:

Q: Will opting out cause my school to not receive funding?

A: By law, all students are entitled to a free, public education. It would be illegal to withhold funding from schools if students opt out.

Q: Won't test scores be required for college entry?

A: State test scores such as OAKS are not required for college entry. Some colleges require SAT or ACT, but over 815 universities across the nation, including several in Oregon, do not require such test scores for admission. View the list at FairTest:

<http://www.fairtest.org/university/optional>

Q: The Test Administration Manual from the Oregon Department of Education only cites disabilities or religious beliefs as a basis for opting out. Can I still opt out just because I don't believe the tests are worthwhile and are unjust in their use?

A: Yes. We have checked with local ministers on this. Religion is a set of beliefs. Disagreeing in the use of high stakes testing is a set of beliefs. Additionally, it would be a violation of civil rights to allow some people to opt out due to their beliefs and not others. If you would like more specific information about addressing religious beliefs for opting out, see this post:

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/timothy-d-slekar/do-not-judge-do-not-conde_b_828770.html

Q: Won't this hurt the ranking of my child's school?

A: It can. Schools that do not meet participation targets in all subgroups will have their overall rating lowered by one category. All subgroups with at least 40 students in assessed grades over two years combined must meet the 95% participation target. These subgroups include economically disadvantaged student, students with disabilities, English learners, and seven identified racial or ethnic groups.

Also, according to the new 2012-2013 Oregon Report Card, a school that does not meet participation targets for every subgroup for two years in a row will have their overall rating lowered by two categories and will be reviewed for particular supports and

interventions. In 2013-2014, per the new Report Card, a school that does not meet participation targets for every subgroup for three years in a row will have their overall rating lowered by three categories which would result in such schools receiving either a Focus or Priority rating. However, there are no consequences to individual students.

Q: What would it really mean to fall into a Focus or Priority category?

A: Schools in this category are to receive “interventions” that help students improve achievement. A team would need to examine why participation rate is low. Obviously, this forces an important discussion. Students that are in Priority and Focus categories based on low test scores receive interventions such as tutoring and closer monitoring of a school. Of course it would not make sense to apply interventions simply on the basis of participation rates. This may be uncharted territory.

Q: Didn't receiving an NCLB waiver mean we didn't have to have such punitive measures?

A: No. The waiver just renamed the measures. You can read more about that here: <http://www.boldapproach.org/policy-blog-templates/stop-nclb-waivers>

Q: Won't this harm my child's teacher because they have to be evaluated based in part on test scores?

A: Participation rate should not factor into such evaluations. As a teacher would have proof from families as to their desire to opt out, this decision should not reflect negatively on teachers.

Q: What about the new tests that are coming out, the Smarter Balanced Assessments? Will they be better and take less time and resources and provide better measures of learning?

A: It is hard to say what the quality will be, but we do know these tests will be more costly. They may take more time if they are given to even more grade levels. In any case, even if they are of “higher quality,” however that is defined, they will still pose the problems we have identified in terms of consequences, lack of application to student learning, and narrowing the curriculum to tested subjects.

As parents, students, and educators, we need to voice how our education money in education should be spent. Should it go to more testing? Or should it go to smaller class sizes and programs and services.