WHY MIGHT I WANT TO OPT OUT?

Public school parents consider opting their child out of high-stakes standardized tests for a variety of reasons:

- Valuable class time is lost to preparing for and taking tests.
- Tested subjects – literacy and math – are prioritized while science, social studies, art and music are shortchanged.
- High stakes create undue stress and anxiety for children.
- Many tested benchmarks are not age appropriate, especially for young children.
- Special needs students face detrimental testing conditions and sometimes miss mandated services because of tests.
- English Language Learners are often expected to take exams in English before they’re ready.

WHAT SHOULD MY FAMILY KNOW BEFORE WE DECIDE WHETHER TO OPT OUT?

Deputy Chancellor Polakow-Suransky of the Department of Education (DOE) has confirmed that parents have the right to opt out.

Based on the experiences of parents who opted out last year, Change the Stakes suggests you consider the following:

- The consequences of opting out vary by school, so you need to work with teachers and administrators to advocate for your child’s promotion to the next grade.
- Opting out a child in 4th or 7th grade may have repercussions for applying to middle or high school.
- Standardized test scores make up a large component of school grades. If a lot of children opt out, the school and individual teachers may be affected.
- Unlike some other states, New York does not have a standardized legal procedure for opting children out of state testing.
What steps should I take if I decide to opt out?

1. Notify the principal in writing with a short explanation of your decision (see example here).
2. Talk to the teacher(s) and administrators about a plan to accommodate your child on testing days. You should not have to keep your child home.
3. Offer teacher(s) support in developing a portfolio of representative work (see below) to support an end-of-year decision to promote your child without state test results.
4. Join or build a network of supportive parents and education activists in your neighborhood. Remember that your family is taking a principled action to secure a better education for your child and that you are not alone!
5. E-mail changethestakes@gmail.com to get in touch with parents who have opted out or visit our website for additional resources.

How will my child be assessed without state test scores?

“Portfolio assessment” is a longstanding alternative to testing that can provide a more comprehensive evaluation of your child.

- A portfolio is a collection of work across subjects that demonstrates the range of a student’s abilities and accomplishments. It might include writing samples, science labs, research reports and math assignments.
- Portfolio assessment is not just for kids who opt out of standardized tests! Students whose test results do not meet DOE cutoffs for promotion can move to the next grade based on a portfolio of work that documents their readiness.
- Ask the educators at your child’s school how portfolios can be used to enhance student assessment and learning.

What else can I do to challenge high-stakes testing?

- Demand information from the DOE or your Community Education Council (CEC) about the amount of school resources dedicated to testing and test preparation.
- Contact your elected officials and political candidates to demand education policies that support learning and limit the amount of standardized testing.
- Visit changethestakes.org to learn more about high-stakes testing, actions you can take and upcoming events. Like us on Facebook and follow us on Twitter!

Change the Stakes is a group of parents and educators who support public education. Our primary focus is high stakes-testing and the harm it causes our children and their schools. We believe high-stakes testing must be replaced by valid forms of student, teacher, and school assessment.