

PARENTS & TEACHERS TOGETHER

Let's Put Learning First



“Children must be taught how to think, not what to think.”

MARGARET MEAD

OUR GOAL

Oregon educators are leading the way to put the focus back on learning. We believe this starts with parents and teachers working together to support the development and implementation of assessments that guide instruction and help us understand where students are excelling and where they need more support.

We need to develop an assessment system that doesn't force teachers to "teach to the test" and instead move to one that actually improves student learning.

THE PROBLEM

The new, unproven standardized test – the Smarter Balanced assessment – is costing us millions with no evidence that it is an effective tool for student learning. Instead of spending precious education dollars on another standardized test we should be investing in the schools our students deserve. That means smaller class sizes and access to art, music, P.E. and other valuable programs.

Currently students and teachers are not being given the time, tools, resources or support to allow teachers and students to successfully transition to the Common Core State Standards. Teachers need to be more involved in how the new standards are implemented and used because ultimately they are on the front lines of helping our students succeed.

THE SOLUTION

We need to develop a system of assessments guided by those closest to the classroom – professional educators – not one driven by corporate interests or politicians. Teachers, students, and our schools must have the resources and funding necessary to ensure a high quality learning environment for every child in Oregon.

It all starts with you!

In the coming months there will be many opportunities to add your voice to this effort. A package of policy proposals aimed at achieving our goals will be introduced during the upcoming legislative session. A group of educators are working closely with the Governor's office, our Chief Education Officer and the Oregon Department of Education to design a new system of assessments – a better way to measure and support student learning. We invite you to learn more about the specifics and how you can get involved with lobby days and legislative town halls.

The information in this tool kit will help you engage parents and teachers in your community. Together we will create the schools our students deserve.

Policy Solutions

STATE & LOCAL POLICY SOLUTIONS

- Phase in the implementation of Common Core State Standards. Field tests of the Smarter Balanced assessment test and a complete evaluation should be completed before moving forward with statewide implementation.
- Create an “Assessment Bill of Rights:”
 - Ensure student privacy and protection of personal data
 - Give parents, students and teachers timely access to test results
 - Increase options for parents who want their children to opt-out of standardized tests
- Create an educator-led review process of the CCSS to assess development appropriateness and determine any necessary adjustments to the standards.
- Provide additional resources for teacher training and professional development.
- Allow local school district flexibility to pilot different approaches to student assessment based on sound assessment practices with an emphasis on teacher-developed, classroom assessments that give teachers and students the feedback they need to ensure success in learning.
- Remove the school and statewide ratings tied to the Smarter Balanced assessment from the Oregon Report Card until the new test has been proven valid, reliable and unbiased.
- Adopt a new system of assessments being developed by the Oregon Assessment Workgroup.

Opting Out of Standardized Tests

FAQS ON YOUR LEGAL RIGHTS AS A PUBLIC EDUCATOR

1. Will my school get into trouble if too many parents opt out?
 - a. Schools with low participation rates may get lower scores on their annual state report card. The scores are one way parents and members of the public assess a public school.
 - b. Schools with low participation may face sanctions and interventions by the state or federal government. Schools that receive Title I funding may be subject to restrictions on funding and possible layoffs if their scores dropped as a result of low participation.
2. Will my students' test scores be a part of my evaluation in the 2014-15 school year?
 - a. No
3. Will student test scores be a part of our school and/or district rating in the 2014-15 school year?
 - a. Yes
4. Are my students at risk of not graduating if they/their parents/guardians opt out of the new assessments?
 - a. No. As long as your student has demonstrated proficiency in the Essential Skills required for high school graduation by successfully completing OAKS or one of the other approved assessment options for meeting the Essential Skills before 2014-15. In, 2014-15, the Grade 12 retest opportunity for OAKS Reading, Writing, and Mathematics Assessment will only be available for 12th graders who have not yet met or exceeded the achievement standard for the Essential Skills. From: Essential Skills and Local Performance Assessment Manual, Updated September 4, 2014.
5. Can I support or promote opt out during working hours? If yes, how?
 - a. Yes...with limitations. You can promote student and parent rights to opt out with colleagues during break periods or lunch periods (when colleagues are also on a break period). Your free speech rights during working hours are limited, however. If your school district determines that your "speech" is disruptive to district policy or the educational process you will be subject to discipline up to and including dismissal.
 - b. If a parent/guardian asks you about opt out you can provide information about the right to do so, reasons for allowing opt out and the district process for doing so.
 - c. If a student asks you about opt-out, your safest course of action is to direct them to on-line resources and ask them to have their parent/guardian contact you or the school district. Be mindful about unduly influencing a minor.
6. Can I encourage parents/guardians to pursue opt out for their children during working hours? During non-working hours?
 - a. There is not an easy "yes" or "no" answer to the first question. School employees should NOT use work time to encourage parents to pursue opt out because the state department of education and all school districts require standardized testing. One exception could be providing opt out information to parents who ask about the process for opting out.
 - b. You can encourage parents/guardians, during non-working hours, to pursue opt out for reasons consistent with state law (currently religion and disability).

Opting Out of Standardized Tests

- 7.** Can I support and promote the right of parents and students to opt out of standardized tests?
 - a.** Yes, keeping in mind restrictions during working hours. Parents, legal guardians and students 18 years of age and older can opt out of testing because of religious beliefs or disability (OAR 581-022-1910); and, you can support and promote their right to do so.
- 8.** Can I speak out publically in support of opt out?
 - a.** Yes. You have a “free speech” right to speak out publically in support of opt out.
 - b.** You have a right to speak out as an individual during NON-WORK hours in public forums such as school board meetings, organized rallies, sporting events, directly to the media and other forums.
- 9.** Can I be disciplined for talking about opt out with my parents?
 - a.** The answer is “yes” if doing so during working hours; and “no” in most cases when talking to parents during non-working hours; but, it depends upon the circumstances in each situation. There are much greater limitations on free speech rights during working hours. (see answer to #1 above)
- 10.** Can I have opt out forms in my classroom and distribute these forms to parents/guardians?
 - a.** If these are official school district opt out forms, the answer is yes. If they are not official school district forms, do not keep and pass them out at school without getting permission from the district.
- 11.** What are the consequences if I choose/refuse to administer standardized tests?
 - a.** You will be subject to discipline up to and including dismissal unless it involves a student whose parents guardians have opted out and the district has given you notice of the opt out. It has long been school district policy and a job duty of school employees to administer standardized tests. Refusing to administer these tests would be considered a violation of district policy and insubordination. Based upon current law and school district policies regarding testing, school employees should NOT refuse to administer standardized tests without knowing and understanding the consequences.
- 12.** What if I believe that a test is particularly stressful to a student or group of students?
 - a.** Do not change or modify the testing protocols. School employees including school administrators have been disciplined and/or dismissed for changing test protocols or offering assistance to students involved in standardized tests.
- 13.** Can my principal get into trouble if too many parents opt out?
 - a.** No. Parents have a legal right to opt out their student.

Local Association Messaging on Assessments

- In Oregon, while we are spending millions of dollars on new, unproven standardized tests we are losing valuable programs that make a difference for kids like art, music, P.E., and vocational/technical education.
- When the federal and state government establish new testing mandates for schools, they need to provide the resources to help students and teachers succeed. Students will succeed with smaller class sizes and access to art, music, P.E. and library services.
- Teachers are spending too much time prepping students to take standardized tests when they could be giving students more individual attention to help students think critically and solve problems.
- Let teachers teach: Teachers report 33% of class time is spent preparing students to take state-mandated tests and 25% of class time is spent preparing students to take district-mandated tests. [Tip: Talk about your local experience. How much time do teachers at your school spend preparing students to take state and district-mandated tests?]
- Good tests should be used to guide instruction, helping teachers understand where students are excelling and where they need more support.
- Our goal is to create a system of assessments that helps guide instruction and improve student learning. Good tests are one tool to measure overall performance.
- Some of the most important things we must do to meet student needs and support meaningful learning include:
 - Investing in smaller class sizes
 - Providing up-to-date instructional materials
 - Restoring P.E., art, and music classes
 - Better inform and engage parents in their child's education

We Believe

In Oregon, we are spending millions of dollars on new standardized tests. At the same time, we rank 2nd in the nation in largest class size and across the state, we've lost valuable programs that make a difference for kids like art, music, P.E., library services and vocational/career technical education.

We must do more and work together to create the public schools our students deserve.

Join us today. Stand with parents and teachers who are working together to create the schools our children deserve.

1. We believe education policy and decisions about how to improve schools should be guided by those closest to the classroom – teachers, parents, and local school leaders – not driven by corporate interests or politicians.
2. We believe good tests should be used to guide instruction, helping teachers understand where students are excelling and where they need more work, but improving student learning should be based on a more broad and whole assessment. Standardized test scores should only be a small part of the equation.
3. We believe parents and teachers want students to do well. When the federal and state governments establish education and testing mandates, they need to provide the resources to help meet the new standards.
4. We believe some of the most important things we must do to meet student needs and support meaningful learning include:
 - Investing in smaller class sizes
 - Providing up-to-date instructional materials
 - Restoring P.E., art, and music classes
 - Better inform and engage parents in their child's education

Framework for Organizing Around Assessments

OEA is engaged in an effort to build a coalition and lead the way toward building a system of assessments that guides instruction and improves student learning.

There is a growing amount of concern expressed by educators, parents, policy makers and community members about the impact of high-stakes, standardized testing on our students and school. This is especially true as Oregon moves to implement the new state standardized test - the Smarter Balanced Assessment - associated with the Common Core State Standards.

Oregon educators have a better way! Instead of spending millions of dollars on standardized tests, we should be investing in schools to give every child the opportunity to succeed. That means smaller class sizes, access to art, music, P.E. and other valuable programs and a system of assessments that guide instruction, helping teachers understand where students are excelling and where they need more work.

This is where you come in! We need your to help to raise awareness of the harm of overemphasizing high-stakes standards testing and in getting members, parents and the public engaged in demanding a system of assessments that actually improves student learning.

We're here to help. As you start planning your actions, let us know how we can help.

OEA's Center for Organizing
organizing@oregoned.org

BELOW ARE A FEW STEPS YOU CAN TAKE

TO BUILD A SUCCESSFUL LOCAL ORGANIZING PLAN:

STEP ONE Start the conversation

- Ask your colleagues and fellow educators to share their experience.
 - How much time do they spend prepping students to take state and district mandated standardized tests?
 - What would they do with the classroom time currently spent on standardized tests?
 - Ask them to share examples of classroom based assessments (formative and/or interim) and how those assessments are used to guide instruction.
- Ask parents if they are aware of the new standardized tests and what concerns they have.

STEP TWO Build Awareness

- Include an article about this issue in your Local Association Newsletter. Use the message points in this toolkit or visit the Parents & Teachers website for content.
- Host a screening of “Standardized” for colleagues, parents, and the community.
- Plan a community meeting to educate parents about the issue.
- Ask colleagues and parents to answer sample Smarter Balance assessment questions and share their reaction.

STEP THREE Call to Action

- Ask supporters to add their name to the Parents and Teachers Together Statement of Principles. (Parents & Teachers website will go here.)
- Call on lawmakers to endorse the statement of principles and delay implementation of the Smarter Balance assessment until the Oregon Assessment Workgroup adopts a new system of assessments.
 - Get a group of parents and teachers to attend the next legislative town hall and raise their concerns.
 - Ask School Board members and district leaders to take the sample Smarter Balance assessment test.
 - Send letters and make phone calls to local and state elected officials.
 - Attend OEA Lobby Day March 23rd.
 - Recruit teachers, school leaders and parents to attend OEA Lobby Day March 23rd.
- Pass a School Board Resolution urging the local district, state, and federal lawmakers to provide the time and resources necessary to develop a reliable system of assessments, fund meaningful professional development, and classroom investments to allow students to succeed.

* If you are going to provide information to colleagues and parents about opting-out you should research your local district policies and procedures. You should also review the FAQ provided in this tool kit – FAQs on Your Legal Rights as a Public Educator.