

PARTICIPATION IN STATEWIDE ASSESSMENTS

Frequently Asked Questions

Taking the annual state assessment as required by Federal and state law is an essential part of measuring and supporting students' academic growth. Without the information gathered from these assessments, teachers and schools are less equipped to best support individual students' learning needs. Assessments provide important information to educators and families regarding their students' academic progress. The required math and English language arts assessment for students in grades 3-11 is the PARCC assessment. Students in grades 4, 7, and 11 will take an assessment in science, the Standards Based Assessment (SBA) Science.

What does the law say about student participation in the state assessment?

Federal Law

Federal law requires that all students in a tested grade participate in the annual statewide assessment. Recent guidance "requires each State educational agency (SEA) that receives funds under Title I, Part A of the ESEA to implement in each local educational agency (LEA) in the State a set of high-quality academic assessments that includes, at a minimum, assessments in mathematics and reading/language arts administered in each of grades 3 through 8 and not less than once during grades 10 through 12; and in science not less than once during grades 3 through 5, grades 6 through 9, and grades 10 through 12. Furthermore, ESEA sections 1111(b)(3)(C)(i) and (ix)(I) require State assessments to 'be the same academic assessments used to measure the achievement of all children' and 'provide for the participation in such assessments of all students.' These requirements do not allow students to be excluded from statewide assessments. Rather, they set out the legal rule that all students in the tested grades must be assessed."

The guidance from the federal government warns that schools, districts and states that fail to meet testing requirements will be at risk of losing millions of dollars in federal funds.

Please see the most recent federal guidance here:

http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/stateletters/eseadclpartrate12222015.pdf

New Mexico Law

New Mexico statute (NMSA 1978, §22-2C-4) states: "All students shall participate in the academic assessment program." By law, all students without an exemption for medical reasons are required to take the state assessment. The statute does not offer an exemption or right of refusal. The "academic assessment program" referred to in the statute is defined as the annual state assessments in specific subject areas (i.e., the SBA or PARCC). As such, all eligible students are expected to participate in the state assessment.

Please refer to the following link for the full text of the relevant New Mexico state law (NMSA 22-2C-4): http://ped.state.nm.us/ped/GradDocs/requirement/NMSA%2022-2C-4.pdf.

How much time is spent on testing?

Tests that are mandated by the state include the state's annual assessments in math and Engish language arts for grades 3 through high school (known previously as SBA, now PARCC), and end-of-course (EOC) exams for all courses offered for high school credit. Overall, New Mexico has reduced state required testing time from 2010- 2015 by 2.5 hours (across all grades). Within the last year, PARCC testing was reduced by an average of 90 minutes per grade level.

If your child is taking other assessments that are not on the list of state required assessments, this is at the direction of your child's teacher, principal, or district leadership. If this is the case, you may consider asking your child's teacher the purpose of these additional assessments. Quality assessments are a powerful tool for educators and parents, and are part of instructional best practice. It is important as a parent to understand the role that any assessment plays in your child's learning.

What happens when a student doesn't participate in the state assessment?

The state assessment provides valuable information about a student's learning and progress to teachers, schools and parents. Specifically, the information from the state assessment helps to inform teachers and schools about a student's academic growth, whether a student is "on grade level" in key subject area such as reading and math, and, as a result, the areas where a student may need extra support and instruction. Without the information gathered from the state assessment, our teachers and schools lose a valuable tool to identify and support an individual student's learning needs.

In addition, the information provided by the state assessment allows teachers and parents to know with confidence how their student is doing in comparison with students in other classrooms and schools across the state and, soon, across the nation.

Second, the annual state assessments fulfill several key high school graduation requirements. While there are alternative measures to fulfill graduation requirements (called alternative demonstrations of competency that are determined by individual districts), not taking the state assessments will limit students' opportunities to fulfill graduation requirements and may jeopardize their ability to graduate on time.

Testing for younger students helps prepare them for more rigorous coursework and to remain "on track" for success in college or a career by providing their teachers and schools with information to help them better meet their academic needs. This information is used to provide the necessary instructional supports to ensure that they are on track to be able to tackle higher level coursework.

By law, all students without an exemption for medical reasons are required to take the state assessment, and the law does not provide for opting out of the statewide assessment outside of medical reasons. Any further questions should be directed to local school districts or schools.

What happens to schools when students don't participate in the state assessment?

Recent Federal guidance reinforces that over 95% of New Mexico's students must participate in annual assessments in order to maintain federal education funding. The guidance from the federal government warns that schools, districts, and states that fail to meet the 95% requirement will be at risk of losing millions of dollars in federal funds.

Also, if a school does not meet the 95% requirement, their A-F school letter grade will be reduced by one grade (for example, a school with a grade of B would automatically receive a grade of C). Refusing to have your student participate in the statewide assessment may impact your school's overall grade.