

Frequently Asked Questions: Participation in Statewide Assessments

Taking the annual state assessment 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 serve individual students' learning needs. This assessment is in the best interest of our students and provides important information to educators and families regarding their students' academic progress.

In previous years, the required state assessment was fulfilled through the Standards-Based Assessment (SBA). This year, in English Language Arts and in math, the SBA will be replaced by a new assessment called PARCC. (Note: Students in grades 4, 7, and 11 will continue taking the SBA in science.)

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

A: 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>.

Q: How much time is spent on testing?

A: Tests that are mandated by the state include the state's annual assessments in math and 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).

The full list of assessments required in state law and their corresponding testing times can be found here:
<http://ped.state.nm.us/ped/AssessmentEvalDocs/New%20Mexico%20Assessment%20Graph%202014-2015.pdf>.

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 district or school the purpose of these additional assessments.

When used responsibly, assessments are a powerful tool for educators 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.

Q: What happens to my student if I refuse to have them participate in the state assessment?

A: 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 areas 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, 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.

Because the law does not provide for opting out of the state assessment, schools may respond differently to a parent's request to refuse testing. PED has clarified that all students attending school must be provided instruction, but how your child's school handles this requirement if you refuse testing for your child is a local decision and will likely vary from school to school.

Q: What happens to my student's school if I refuse to have them participate in the state assessment?

A: Based on federal law, all schools are required to assess at least 95% of their eligible students using the statewide assessment. The full federal requirements can be found here:

<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/leg/esea02/pg2.html>.

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.

As mentioned above, federal regulations require that over 95% of New Mexico's students participate in annual assessments in order to maintain federal education funding. If New Mexico as a state does not meet the federal requirement of 95% participation for all students, there is a risk that the state may lose federal funding for public education.