

Choctaw County School District

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Statewide assessments are a useful and valid tool that assist the MDE, the SBE, and the Mississippi Legislature in evaluating schools, school districts, and generally the progress that we are making in raising the level and quality of education across our state. Statewide testing is so important that it has actually been codified in state law. (Mississippi Code §§ 37-16-1, et seq.). Along with the MDE every school district in the state is required to “periodically assess student performance and achievement in each school.” (Mississippi Code § 37-16-5). Mississippi law mandates that “basic skills tests shall be completed by each student” and “in the event of excused or unexcused absences, make-up tests shall be given.” (Mississippi Code § 37-16-3 (2)). In summary, student assessments are not an option, they are a requirement. School districts are not required to provide alternative activities on testing days for students whose parents do not want them to take scheduled tests.

The SBE has selected the Mississippi College and Career Ready Standards for use in determining the readiness of our students for advancement, college preparedness, and career advancement. These standards identify the goals for what students should know at each grade level. Students enrolled in our public schools will be taught these standards. These standards are an integral part of daily instruction in our schools. There is no provision for students to “opt out” of daily classroom instruction.

The assessments or testing do not alter the daily classroom instruction that your student receives. The assessment, to an extent, reflects the ability to communicate the standards and the level of comprehension of the standards by the students. The assessment is a valuable tool to the school, our school district, as well as to you and your student. The report you receive may help you evaluate whether your student is on track in acquiring the educational skills necessary to prepare them for college or success in a profession or occupation.

Our local school board has the same authority that it did prior to the adoption of the new standards by the SBE. Decisions about how to teach the standards, such as curriculum, tools, materials, and textbooks, continue to be made by our school district and our school leaders who know our students best.

There are potential negative consequences that could result from the failure of students to participate in assessments. The Every Student Succeeds Act requires participation of “all students” in statewide assessments. Schools have to demonstrate “adequate yearly progress” towards improving student achievement in reading, mathematics, and science.

Failure to participate also jeopardizes the accreditation of schools and school districts. Additionally, school districts that fail to administer tests to the proscribed percentage of students lose a letter grade under the current policy on school accountability.

Failure to participate in the assessments have other potential negative consequences. Advancement from third to fourth grade and even graduation from high school are dependent upon taking statewide assessments.

We hope this letter demonstrates that there is nothing new or unusual in statewide and even districtwide assessment of the educational progress of our students. Again, thank you for your interest and involvement in our educational process. With your help and participation we will improve the quality of education in our state.


Sincerely,

Stewart G. Beard, Jr.



MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Carey M. Wright, Ed.D.
State Superintendent of Education

TO: District Superintendents
From: Carey M. Wright, Ed.D. 
Date: March 2, 2015
Re: Opting out of statewide assessments

School districts across our state have received requests from parents to exempt, excuse or otherwise allow their children to “opt out” of any and all statewide student assessments. The MDE and the SBE are committed to providing the children of our state with a quality public education that has a positive effect on the social, cultural and economic benefits of our citizens.

Statewide assessments are a useful and valid tool that assist the MDE, the SBE, and the Mississippi Legislature in evaluating schools, school districts, and generally the progress that we are making in raising the level and quality of education across our state. Statewide testing is so important that it has actually been codified in state law (Mississippi Code §§ 37-16-1, et seq.). Mississippi law mandates that “basic skills tests shall be completed by each student” and “in the event of excused or unexcused absences, make-up tests shall be given.” (Mississippi Code § 37-16-3 (2)). Along with the MDE every school district in the state is required to “periodically assess student performance and achievement in each school.” (Mississippi Code § 37-16-5). In summary, student assessments are not an option, they are a requirement.

School districts are not required to provide alternative activities on testing days for students whose parents do not want them to take scheduled tests. Should you have students who arrive for school on testing days whose parents refuse to allow them to take state tests, it is critical for your district to:

1. Ensure students “opting out” of tests do not disrupt the administration of state tests.
2. Document the names, grades, and actual assessments for students who refuse to be tested. Your District Test Coordinator will need this information to input into Pearson’s online delivery platform at the end of the PBA cycle and the EOY cycle.
3. Provide a safe and orderly environment for all students in attendance each day. Consider providing an alternative, supervised setting where students whose families refuse to allow them to be tested can work independently.

To assist school districts with a response to requests to “opt out,” the MDE is providing the attached suggested form response letter. The attached response letter is provided as guidance and is not a requirement. Each school and school district may need to individualize their response letter to insure that it is effective in each situation.

Thank you for your attention, your professionalism, and the work that you do.