

**Testing opt-out/Refusal guide for New Jersey**

**Form completed by** Jean Schutt-McTavish

**Contact information (email)** isola8@gmail.com

**List of Assessments**

<b>State Assessments</b>	<b>Subject</b>	<b>Grades</b>	<b>Administration Date</b>	<b>Duration</b>
NJ ASK	ELA & Math	3 through 5	Mid May	4 days of testing 5 days of make up
NJ ASK	Science	4 <sup>th</sup> grade	Same window as above	Same window as above
NJ ASK	ELA & Math	6 through 8	Early May	4 days of testing 5 days of make up
NJ ASK	Science	8 <sup>th</sup> grade	Same window as above	Same window as above
HSPA	ELA & Math	11 <sup>th</sup> grade or retained 12 graders (Graduation Requirement)	October or March	3 days of testing 3 days of make up
NJBCT	Biology	Graduation Requirement	May	2 days of testing 2 days of make up
AHSA	ELA & Math	Graduation Requirement for students who failed HSPA multiple times	January, March, June	
APA	Alternative Assessment for students with severe disabilities	All grades	Portfolio developed over the school year	
ACCESS	English Literacy	English Language Learners	March Testing Window	

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/assessment/schedule.shtml>

Check this link for upcoming test dates.

<b>District Assessments (Diagnostics and Benchmarking)</b>	<b>Grade</b>	<b>Frequent Administration Windows</b>

iLearn	Pre-K	Beginning, Middle, End of Year
DIBELS	Early Grades	Beginning, Middle, End of Year
MAP	Middle and High School	Beginning, Middle, End of Year
Fountas and Pinnell	Elementary and Middle School	Beginning, Middle, End of Year
Learnia	Elementary and Middle school	Beginning, Middle, End of Year
Terra Nova	Elementary and Middle School	Beginning, Middle, End of Year
District or School made assessments	All Grades	Frequent. These are more likely to be curriculum based and should tell teachers and parents how students are actually doing in school.

### Special considerations for the above assessments

The HSPA or AHSA and the NJBCT are required for high school graduation. Check your school district for the specific criteria used for promotion and placement in special programs such as Gifted programs, honors classes, etc. NJ ASK scores are often one of a number of measures considered when placing students in classes. Some districts have penalized students for opting out of the State assessments.

To our knowledge, there have been no adverse consequences for any family in our state for opting out of the District Assessments.

### Procedures for opt-out/refusal

#### What you can expect:

Currently, NJ requires that all students in the above grades must be tested. There are no loopholes. School district administrators interpret NJ's testing provisions differently from district to district. Some parents report that their children were placed in a lower grade classroom to "help" during testing. Other parents report that after keeping their children home during the testing portion of the day, their children were allowed to join their class for the remainder of the day as well as during the makeup days. Still other parents report being **threatened** with a report to DFYS for violating the state's truancy laws. These children had to be kept home during testing as well as during the makeup period. The best way to find out how your district handles opting out is to ask others in your district who have done it before. You may be able to find them here:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/OptOutNewJersey/> or here

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/unitedoptout/>

Write a letter to the superintendent and cc principal, school board members, and teachers that states what tests you would like to opt out of and why you are opting out.

## Urgency for opt-out/refusal

### Personal Reasons:

- Test preparation and teaching to the test waste valuable instructional time.
- Multiple choice drills and formulaic writing are not what our children need to be successful adults.
- High stakes assessments put undo pressure on our children to perform for promotion/graduation
- High stakes tests used in personnel decisions put undo pressure on our children to perform to protect their teachers and schools.

### Community Reasons:

- Federal and NJ policies are designed to take away local control of education decisions including use of tax dollars and curriculum content
- NJ's NCLB waiver is an unfunded mandate that will require districts to significantly increase expenditures on technology for the sake of testing as opposed to authentic learning
- Lack of community input into decisions regarding curriculum and instruction undermines both our communities and our democracy

### Sample language to include in opt-out/refusal

Below are links to examples of opt out letters we have used in NJ and in other states. We have a group on Facebook (see link below). Send us a request if you would like to join our conversation even if you aren't sure you want to opt out.

<http://unitedoptout.com/opt-out-letters/>

### Sample opt out letter

Good afternoon.

Please be advised that I do not permit my children to participate in the NJ ASK or any other standardized testing for state report cards and NCLB/RTTT accountability. I believe that this kind of testing is, at best, counter-productive and perhaps even harmful to my children's education and development. My position is based on my conscientious objection to the State of New Jersey and the U.S. Department of Education employing an early 20<sup>th</sup> Century assessment model, which reflects the goals, aspirations and knowledge of that time, in order to make high-stakes decisions about the effectiveness of teaching, learning, and schooling today. This kind of high-stakes testing is not based on what we know about teaching and learning in 2012, nor can it prepare our children for the demands of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. The State of New Jersey and the USDOE overstep their

bounds and do a disservice to the public when they ignore professionals in local schools by arbitrarily making high-stakes educational decisions based on standardized tests. Finally, this absurd emphasis on standardized testing depletes valuable tax dollars that could otherwise be spent on improving and supporting teaching and learning. As a parent and a 26-year veteran NYC public school educator, my children's development as life-long learners is a top priority. Educators know that assessment is either **for learning** or assessment is **of learning**. Assessments (or "testing") should always generate feedback that students can apply to their future learning. Professionally, we know that assessment **for accountability** is wrong. The NJ ASK gives the Ridgewood Public Schools no information that they don't already have. Ridgewood parents and residents insist on excellent public schools. Our local government and our democratic electoral process ensure that we consistently have high performing schools. In urban areas such as Newark, Jersey City, Camden, Paterson, and New York City, high stakes testing for the purpose of school and school district accountability dooms the most needy students to months of intellectually bankrupt classroom experience. *The curriculum narrows in order to ensure that students can respond correctly to multiple-choice questions or formulaic short answer and essay questions.* Timed, one-chance tests subject **all children** to the perceived possibility of humiliation and failure. This pressure to perform scars children and robs them of their natural curiosity and innate desire to learn. In fact, our current understanding of the neuroscience of learning indicates strongly that the environment created by high-stakes testing actually inhibits learning. No Child Left Behind, including New Jersey's current waiver from the sanctions of that legislation, fails to improve educational outcomes for students. Ironically, it leaves increased numbers of "minority" subgroups and economically disadvantaged students even further behind. My children have had a wonderful experience at both Orchard School and George Washington Middle School. In fact, I too, am a product of the Ridgewood Public Schools. As a result of the strong educational foundation established here in Ridgewood, I was able to attend two of our nation's finest post secondary institutions in order to pursue my dreams. Personally and professionally, I must stand with the thousands of courageous parents, schoolteachers and administrators across our nation who are boycotting high stakes testing. By opting out of standardized testing, we will deny the USDOE the data that supports its ill-conceived agenda for education reform. Together we will work to improve public education for all students based on current educational and scientific research. As citizens, it is our responsibility to save our public schools.

Sincerely,

Jean McTavish

## Resources and organizations

Save Our Schools NJ  
Education Law Center  
The Abbot Leadership Institute  
Our Children Our Schools NJ  
Parents Advocating for Children's Education (PACE)  
PULSE (Parents United for Local School Education)  
New Jersey Teachers Activist Group  
Our Village Our Schools  
Save Our Schools March New Jersey  
Parents Across America

### State specific watch-list

Council of Chief State School Officers

Achieve

**Foundation For Newark's Future/Mark Zuckerberg's grant \$**

Students First (partners with B4K)  
NJ CAN (State Affiliate of 50CAN)  
Broad Foundation (Eli Broad)  
New School Venture Fund  
National Charter School Association  
National Council on Teacher Quality  
Black Alliance for Education Options  
Democrats for Education Reform  
American Federation for Children  
ALEC (American Legislative Exchange Council; see ALEC Exposed)  
K-12 Inc.

Pearson

Chiefs for Change (Cerf is founding member)

New Leaders for New Schools

Teach For America

### **Additional or miscellaneous information**

OPT OUT in New Jersey – a legal right as stated by Will Richardson. Read here – <http://willrichardson.com/post/21226188628/opting-out>

Opting Out of NJ ASK

Educator and Parent OPTS out in NJ

Education Code on NJ

See subchapter four on page

32<http://www.nj.gov/education/code/current/title6a/chap8.pdf>

<http://www.state.nj.us/education/code/current/title6a/chap8.pdf>