

Informational Meeting at The Children's School 3/20/2015

What is the Children's School's position on opting out of the State Tests?

The Administration takes no position on opting in or opting out of the State Tests. The PAC has spoken with Mr. Artie and he has advised that that each family should make a decision regarding testing for their individual child, and he will respect that decision.

The NYC Department of Education updated its "Student Participation in Grades 3-8 New York State Tests Parent Guide" on March 6, 2015. It states that if a parent wishes to opt their child out of the exams:

"the principal should respect the parents' decision and let them know that the school will work to the best of their ability to provide the child with an alternate educational activity (e.g., reading) during testing times." (see handout)

What will my child do during the testing periods if he or she opts out?

The Children's School Administration has advised that the activities offered during the testing periods will be dependent on how many students opt out. Last year it was a small number and students spent the time helping in non-testing grade classrooms. If there are enough students opting out in a particular grade then instruction may be given in a separate room. As per the DOE parent guide, what activity is offered for children opting out is up to the Principal of the school. If you know you will be opting your child out of the test you must notify the principal in writing. It is advisable to do this as soon as possible so the Administration can make plans for your child, and for the school as a whole.

Will the School's Budget or Teachers be negatively affected if I opt my child out of the test.

The Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) dictates that if more than 5% of testing eligible children opt out of the state test the school may be labeled as not making "Adequate Yearly Progress"(AYP). The possible consequences of not making AYP are:

-After three years of missing AYP for the same subgroup, a school can be identified as a Local Assistance Plan (LAP) school. LAP schools are not considered "in good standing" and are generally subject to additional reporting and self-review requirements.

-Existing Priority and Focus schools—schools that are identified as the lowest performing by the State—that do not make the AYP participation target cannot be removed from this negative status.

-Schools that do not meet the participation rate criteria are not eligible to be considered "Reward school" status, which highlights schools identified as demonstrating high performance or high progress relative to other schools in the State.

(Source:DOE "Student Participation in Grades 3-8 New York State Tests Parent Guide")

However, as a practical matter there are no budgetary implications to any of these consequences unless you are a school that receives Federal Title 1 funding (for schools with a high percentage of students who receive free and reduced price lunch). Children's School does not receive Title 1 funding. Even for schools that do, no funding is lost if a school fails to make AYP, but the state or federal government may impose restrictions on how some of the Title 1 funds are used. For more information on NCLB sanctions see:
www.fairtest.org/why-you-can-boycott-the-test-without-fear

Last year (2014) several New York City schools had large numbers of children opt out of the test, including: Brooklyn New School, the Earth School, PS 446, I.C.E., Arts and Letters. Anna Allenbrook, Principal of BNS, has reported that to date her school has not been labeled as not making AYP and has not suffered any sanctions despite have an 80% opt out rate last year. ICE and Earth school have had significant non-participation for 2 years now and have not suffered any consequences.

There are conversations about opting out happening at several district 15 schools including PS 321, PS 295, PS 10, PS 29, PS 261, PS 124 (Source: Websites of individual schools). However at this point no one knows how many students will actually opt out at any particular school.

Regarding Teachers Evaluations, since 2013 the state test scores have been a part of the teacher evaluation score--currently 20%, and proposed to go up to 50%. The DOE has not issued any guidelines regarding how evaluations will be adjusted if none or only a minority if students in a given class take the test.

My Child is in 4th Grade. How are the 4th Grade test scores used in the Middle school Admissions Process?

For the 2014-2015 admissions season the following District 15 and citywide middle schools **did not use State Test Scores at all** in their admissions process (source: website of each individual school):

MS 51, Math and Science (MS 447), New Voices, Park Slope Collegiate, IS 136, Brooklyn School for Collaborative Studies, MS 442, BUGS, Brooklyn Prospect Charter School, Institute for Collaborative Education (I.C.E.), Mark Twain

Please visit the websites for specific information on the admissions criteria for each school. Generally, children are ranked for admission based on a combination of factors including: attendance, 4th and 5th grade report cards, auditions or interviews, and school administered assessments.

It is possible for schools to change their admissions criteria from year to year--for example MS 51 did use test scores as a primary factor until this year. But as of March 31, 2014 the New York State Legislature passed a law which prohibits the use of the state test scores as a primary factor in promotions or admissions. So in no case can test scores constitute greater than 49% of admissions criteria:

"[N]o school district shall make any student promotion or placement decisions based solely or primarily on student performance on the state administered standardized English Language Arts and Mathematics assessments for grades three through eight. However, a school district may consider student performance on such state assessments provided that the school district uses multiple measures in addition to such assessments and that such assessments do not constitute the major factor in such determinations."

NYS Education Law, Section 305, subdivision 47

Perhaps most importantly, District 15 elementary school The Brooklyn New School (which had 80% of their children opt out of the test in 2014) conducted a survey of every school in District 15 (updated in February 2015) and asked "How do you use state ELA and math test scores in your admissions process? What is the application process for students without scores?" (see handout). **Every school surveyed either did not use test scores at all, or provided alternative admissions procedures for students who did not take the tests**

Where can I get more information about the tests?

<http://inclusions.org/category/ps-372-pac/>

Our very own blog!

<http://www.bns146.org./content/parent-action-committee-pac>

Includes a powerpoint presentation by Anna Allenbrook, Principal of Brooklyn New School, that discusses how the tests are used and analyzes specific questions, answers, and grading of the tests.

The site also includes all of the notes from a series of meetings that Anna and BNS teachers held at BNS last year exploring the test and the option of opting out.

<http://www.parentvoicesny.org/videos-of-ps-261-opt-out-forum-videos/>

Video of the Opt In/Opt out forum held at PS 261 on March 4, 2015

Speakers include: Anna Allenbrook, Principal BNS; Sam Coleman, teacher, PS 24 Brooklyn, Carol Burris, Principal South Side High School, Rockville Centre Long Island, and others

<http://fairtest.org>

Anti-testing site focused on issues at the federal level