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What happens to students who don't take PARCC tests?

PARENTS PROTEST HIGH STAKES TESTING CULTURE; EXPERTS QUESTION ITS
EFFECTIVENESS.

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Come June, parents of 49,000 students who refused PARCC tests this year will breathe a sigh of relief and put the controversial tests behind them. They may not realize, though, their children's academic future may be at risk.

Not having the test results means students could be overlooked for chances to advance to gifted and talented programs or get the help they need for their studies, especially in an education culture that relies so heavily on standardized testing. Experts say Americans are tested more than students in other countries, despite being so far behind the rest of the world in math.

"There's a disadvantage for a student in the system who continues not to be a part of the assessments," said Bari Erlichson, assistant commissioner of data, research, evaluation and reporting for the New Jersey Department of Education. "Teachers won't know and parents don't know where they are (educationally), and people can't advocate on behalf of that child."

But even with its shortfalls, standardized testing is still the law. The parents of students who refused the tests — along with countless others who didn't take the test seriously — could be wreaking havoc not only on their own futures, but on teachers who will soon be evaluated based on those test scores.

"A lot of the kids that weren't opted out that took (PARCC) would say that they just clicked and put down random answers," said Thomas Dalessio, a 10th grader at Toms River High School East who refused the exams. "And for the essay, they just wrote whatever they wanted."

Anti-PARCC parents in the 13 states that have adopted PARCC have been showing their opposition by allowing their children to skip the test. They argue PARCC is too difficult, too stressful and take away too much learning time.

Why Finland has fewer tests and smarter kids

<http://www.app.com/story/news/education/2015/05/08/finland-education-system/26993377/>

The computer-based testing system is aligned with the Common Core, a set of standards designed to close the achievement gap and make sure students in all states are learning what they need to compete globally.

New Jersey leaves decisions about whether a student should be held back, moved to the next grade or placed in advanced classes up to local districts, Erlichson said. Not taking the test means those scores won't be there to help make important decisions about a child's learning.

Standardized tests measures a student's performance and growth year-over-year in a way local assessments and classroom tests aren't designed to do, Erlichson said.

Most states, however, won't have figures on the total participation rate — which is required to be calculated under federal law — until late summer or early fall. New Jersey calculated preliminary refusal rates after the first half of the PARCC exams were given.

Students share their thoughts on PARCC

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Overall, about 6 percent of 794,836 New Jersey students opted out of the exams, but that doesn't include 10th graders. About 7 percent of ninth graders and 15 percent of 11th grades have refused the test, state education officials said. New Jersey didn't include 10th graders and other specific tests in its tally.

PARCC test scores that were taken this year won't be available to teachers or parents until the start of the next school year, Erlichson said. But in years going forward, that information will be available at the end of the school year in which the tests were taken.

"I agree with assessing districts and schools, but I (think that should be) one test in certain grade levels just to gauge it," said Kathleen Dalessio, Thomas' mother. "This is being used to determine graduation (in the future). This is being used to evaluate teachers, rank schools, close schools."



More students in higher grade levels opted out of the controversial PARCC tests.

Kala Kachmar/Asbury Park Press

Dalessio said she always keeps a close eye on her son's grades. She doesn't believe

refusing the test will hurt his future or his ability to get into college, she said.

Dan Battey, a math education professor at the Rutgers University Graduate School of Education in New Brunswick, said there will likely be more consequences to not taking the PARCC for urban schools and schools with high numbers of economically disadvantaged students. Students in upper-middle class communities tend to have more resources and good education systems, meaning students are more likely to succeed regardless of how they perform on the test.

The PARCC scores will help teachers get a baseline of student knowledge when the school year starts instead of spending several weeks trying to determine what students know and don't know, Erlichson said. Having huge gaps in score information won't help teachers adjust instruction.

"We have an obligation to make sure our students are testing. All kids matter," Erlichson said. "It's important that we gather as much information so no child is invisible to us."

Even though students who don't take standardized tests risk falling behind, experts say there might be some merit to the arguments parents are making.



Testing culture: Leaving students behind?

Battey said the increased focus on testing in the U.S. is leaving students further behind their peers in other countries.

"Testing is distinctly American. Countries that outperform us don't test like we do," said Jon Zimmerman, an education history professor at New York University. "And yet, our testing regime originated in an effort to compete with them."

No Child Left Behind, legislation signed into law in 2002 that required states to test every child, was created to close achievement gaps and ensure teachers, schools, districts and states were adequately educating all students, Zimmerman said.

Since No Child Left Behind, there's more pressure on teachers and schools to make sure students perform better on tests, Battey said. One way districts have responded to make sure they're prepared for the state tests is to give district-wide tests. New Jersey, among other states, plan to use PARCC scores to evaluate teachers in the future, meaning their income and jobs will depend on how well their students do.

The U.S. ranked 35th out of 60 countries whose 15-year-old students were surveyed in math, according to data from the Program for International Student Assessment. America's top performers also scored below the international average, the survey found.

Countries that are always at the top in math include Singapore, China, Korea and Finland.

Canada and Australia, which most recently ranked 13th and 19th in math globally, have governments and education systems structured similarly to the U.S., but they don't test nearly as often in those countries as America does, Battey said.

Battey said most countries don't break down math into algebra, geometry and calculus like America does. Countries that do well in math teach them as integrated concepts, so students can understand how math interacts with real life.

"The big idea with Common Core was to push deeper into content rather than teaching absolutely everything and trying to cover everything with a thinner layer," Battey said. "The standards are pretty high quality... But the more testing you do, the less instruction time you have. I don't know of any country that assesses as much as we do."

\$108 million for PARCC? NJ unveils price tag

[\(http://www.app.com/story/news/education/2015/03/09/new-jerseys-parcc-contract-pearson-million/24668665/\)](http://www.app.com/story/news/education/2015/03/09/new-jerseys-parcc-contract-pearson-million/24668665/)

The state's previous standardized test, NJASK, was given to students in grades 3 through 8. Students in grade 11 had to take the High School Proficiency Assessment (HSPA). But with the PARCC, students in grades 3 through 11 are taking two tests in math and two in English language arts/literacy.

"A lot of these feedback systems don't give teachers enough detailed information to be able to change instruction," Battey said. "The more we tie things like merit pay to teaching, the more pressure teachers feel. Then they pass it down to the students."

When students feel anxiety or become fatigued from testing, they're more likely to lose interest or energy on the test and do worse, Battey said.

Zimmerman, an NYU professor who studies the history of American education, said this new process will mean states will be evaluating — and possibly paying — teachers based on a measure that doesn't necessarily capture what teachers do in the classroom.



Dan Battey, assistant professor of math education at the Rutgers University Graduate School of Education in New Brunswick.

(Photo: Kala Kachmar/Asbury Park Press)

"These measures presume that through a test, we can figure out what each teacher added or subtracted to a kid's learning," Zimmerman said.



A 'radical departure'

No Child Left Behind and the culture of testing is a radical departure from what education was like before because the federal government had little to do with education, Zimmerman said.

"The major thing that's changed is we're putting new demands on our schools," he said. "In earlier eras of American history, it was quite possible to reach the middle class and support yourself without getting a lot of formal education. It's a myth that our schools are worse, but it's true that they're falling short of what we're expecting, and that's because our expectations have risen."

PARCC measures gap. Keansburg closes it

[\(http://www.app.com/story/news/investigations/watchdog/government/2015/02/13/new-jersey-parcc-test-leaves-poor-students-behind/23356959/\)](http://www.app.com/story/news/investigations/watchdog/government/2015/02/13/new-jersey-parcc-test-leaves-poor-students-behind/23356959/)

Formal education has become necessary for economic independence, Zimmerman said. The Common Core was designed to make sure all students had the education needed to get into college and then get jobs that will allow America to compete in a global economy, he said.

"I don't see (testing) dying down because the districts and schools try to predict how they'll do on the state test," Battey said. "They want information. They're in the business of not losing schools and not losing funding."

If too few New Jersey students participate in PARCC, schools could risk losing funding. Schools that don't have a 95 percent participation rate could risk sanctions from both the state and federal education departments.

"I don't see the federal government backing off testing either," Battey said. "I just think it'll transform, like most things in education do. If PARCC goes away in two years, the state still has to test."

Preliminary opt-out data

Grades 3-8: 4.6 percent

Grade 9: 7 percent

Grade 11: 14.5 percent

Source: New Jersey Department of Education



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