



MISSISSIPPI DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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

TO: District Superintendents
From: Carey M. Wright, Ed.D. *CW*
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.