

Information Regarding Student Participation in the
Washington Comprehensive Assessment Program:

Measurements of Student Progress (MSP)
High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE)
Washington Alternate Assessment System (WAAS-Portfolio)

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Information Regarding Student Participation in the Washington Comprehensive Assessment Program (Washington State Assessment)

Background Information

To help educators interpret the Washington state legislation outlined in RCW 28A.655.070 that mandates the administration of the Washington state assessment, the Spring 2010 Assessment Coordinators Manual states (pg. 22):

Federal and state laws require public schools to administer assessments to students enrolled in the specified grades and subjects, the assumption apparently being that participation on the part of the student or approval on the part of the parent would not be an issue. Because it is not specifically addressed in the legislation, agency policy adopted has been that students may refuse to participate or their parents may refuse to have their children tested. The policy further requires the school to request that the refusal on the part of either the student or parent be put into writing by the parent and kept on file at the school or district office. It is also recommended that the parent be requested to include the reason for not wanting the child tested. If any parent is unwilling to put the refusal in writing, the school should document that the request was made but the parent would not put the refusal in writing. This refusal will not avoid any consequence for not testing, such as failure to graduate.

. . . Schools and teachers are not required to create a distinct curriculum for students whose parents have asked that they not be tested on the state assessment. Schools are not obligated to provide an alternate curriculum or other lessons to students refusing testing during the time the state assessments are being administered. However, schools must provide supervision for students who are not testing for any reason.

Professional Expectations

Students show us what they know and can do in a variety of ways. Teachers gather student learning information through daily ongoing classroom assessment. In addition to classroom assessments, we need to collect student learning information that is common across classrooms, schools, and districts. Student learning information that is common across all students at a given grade level or all students in a certain program serves a number of purposes, including student placement, program evaluation, goal setting, system accountability, and monitoring student progress over time.

Our role as professionals requires us to create the most positive and supportive testing atmosphere possible, to help students optimally show us what they know and can do under a variety of assessment situations. As professionals, public school employees have a responsibility to communicate the expectation that students will participate in all assessments stipulated for their grade level.

Specific Teacher/Administrator Responsibilities

Prior to the administration of each state-mandated assessment, the district Assessment Office provides information about teacher/test administrator responsibilities to each building test coordinator. A key message is for teachers to set a positive climate, helping students understand the purpose of the assessment as well as to feel comfortable and prepared for the assessment. Specifically, two responsibilities are:

- ✓ Communicate with parents and students about the importance of the assessment (e.g., *results will give information to help us teach students better*).

- ✓ Provide positive encouragement to students and explain why the test is being given (e.g., *so we know how well you are learning*).

Only if a student or parent directly asks a staff member whether opting out of the state assessment is possible should this action be discussed.

In 1999, the Washington Educational Research Association (WERA) produced a White Paper entitled “Ethical Standards in Testing: Test Preparation and Administration.” This document, revised in 2001, outlines responsibilities that school personnel should follow in regard to test administration and test preparation.

In addition to the teacher’s role, the WERA White Paper describes the role of school administrators in test preparation and administration. A key responsibility for the administrator is to support teachers in fulfilling their responsibilities as well as to help parents understand the purpose of the assessment and how the results are used. Specifically, the role of the administrator includes:

- ✓ Informing both students and parents about what each test does and does not do, when and how it will be administered, and how the results will be reported and used.
- ✓ Indicating the importance of tests for students, staff, and the school.
- ✓ Stressing the importance of school attendance on the scheduled testing dates.

Copies of the WERA White Paper can be obtained on-line at www.wera-web.org. (Click on “Publications.”)

Student/Parent Rights of Refusal

The intent of state and district policy is that all students participate in state-mandated assessments. However, as noted in the first section of this document (under *Background Information*), parents have the right to refuse for their child to take the state assessment but must accept the consequences of the action. In cases where a student refuses to take the assessment, the parent should be contacted. In this way, parents should be a part of the decision in all cases.

If a student refuses or the student’s parent refuses to allow participation, the back cover (the demographic page) of each test booklet is coded “REFUSED” for each subject in which the student was not tested. This classification is treated as “not having met standard” on the school, district, and state results.

While parents and students have a legal right to refuse the assessment, it is the responsibility of school personnel to:

- make sure parents and students understand all ramifications of this decision, including the fact that refusing to participate in testing in no way releases the student from the consequences resulting from that action.
- document the refusal and the reason for the refusal.

The protocols outlined on the following pages are designed to ensure that these two criteria are met.

Student Refusal to Take the State Assessment—Suggested Steps

- ✓ If a student refuses to take the state assessment, talk with the student to try to determine the reason(s) behind the student's refusal.
- ✓ Often a student feels s/he may not do well (but rarely admits this outright) and might choose to not take the test rather than show poor performance. Explain that the purpose of the test is for the student to show what s/he has learned. The test results will help the student's teacher(s) improve their instruction to help all students learn better. It is important for the students to just do the best they can. If the student has difficulty in certain areas of the assessment, the teachers need to know this to plan instruction to meet the student's needs. But if the student does not take the test or leaves a lot of items blank, the teacher will not have useful information about the child's needs.
- ✓ Sometimes a child feels too much pressure about the importance of doing well, and the anxiety can be overwhelming. In this situation, the question is— what is the source of this pressure? If it stems from parents, then it is important to help parents put the assessment in perspective and to help alleviate the child's anxiety. If the pressure stems from teachers, then the administrator should work with the teacher(s) to help place the assessment in the proper context for the student. This situation often has been created over a long period of time and may be difficult to mitigate at the time of the test. If so, school staff might set a goal for the subsequent year to alter the messages being imparted to students and parents about the assessment.
- ✓ The objective should be to decrease the chances that students feel a need or desire to refuse to take the state assessment. An effective strategy is to create a positive school climate that emphasizes the importance of "showing what you know" without causing students to think that there are negative consequences if they do not perform well.
- ✓ With the state assessment administered at every grade level from 3-8, the long-term goal is for students to think, "Taking the state assessment is no big deal. I know how to do this; I do it every year."
- ✓ If discussions with the student do not convince him/her to participate in the state assessment, then the teacher or administrator should contact the student's parents. Often the parent can help persuade their child to take the test and try their best. It is important for the parent to communicate a message about the importance of taking the test that is consistent with that of the school.

Parent Refusal to Allow Their Child to Take the State Assessment—Suggested Steps

- ✓ If a parent refuses to allow their child to be tested on the state assessment, talk with him/her about their reasons for this decision.
- ✓ Often parents have misconceptions about the test. Spend some time trying to get at the root of the issues they have. Sometimes they are upset about other concerns (e.g., *the school has spent too much time on test preparation; the test is too difficult for this grade level; the test is just serving a political agenda*) that can be addressed directly only when the true issues are surfaced.
- ✓ Let the parents know they may **review items from previous administrations of the state assessment** to see for themselves the kinds of questions on the test. Actual test items (with scoring guides and sample student answers) have been “released” to the public for a number of years and are available on-line (www.k12.wa.us/assessment/WASL/testquestions.aspx) as well as in paper format (call 1-888-59-LEARN). Administrators should have a copy of state assessment released items in their school to show parents, as well as information as to how parents can obtain copies of released items themselves.
- ✓ When showing released items to parents, ask the following key question: *Do they see anything on the test that they would not consider valuable for their child to be able to know or be able to do?* Help relate the assessment outcomes to state standards and to the student’s future success.
- ✓ Let parents know that they can **request to see their child’s completed state assessment** booklets after the tests are scored. To do this, parents submit a written request to the state assessment office at OSPI, and the booklets are shipped to the district assessment director, who then contacts the parents to schedule the viewing. Information about this is at www.k12.wa.us/assessment/StudentRecordRequest.aspx.
- ✓ **All students in the graduating class of 2008 and later must meet standard on the Reading and Writing portions of the High School state assessment (or an approved alternative) in order to receive a diploma.** Students who do not meet standard on the Math HSPE must earn 2.0 math credits after 10th grade in order to receive a diploma. Starting with the class of 2013, students must meet standard on the Reading, Writing, Math, and Science portions of the HSPE in order to receive a diploma. Make sure parents understand that:
 - **If a parent refuses their child’s participation in the High School Reading and Writing state assessment, the student will not receive a diploma.**
 - Students will have at least five opportunities to take any of the sections of the HSPE.
 - Special education and ELL students are allowed testing accommodations to help them access the test and show their achievement on state standards.
 - When appropriate, special education students may take an alternate test -- either the state assessment with Level 2 meeting standard or a portfolio assessment. Special education students in grades 11 and 12 may also take the HSPE at a lower grade level or a locally determined assessment and receive a diploma when they meet standard.
 - Alternatives are available for regular education high school students who show they meet standard in their classroom-based assignments but for some reason are unable to show it on the state assessment (e.g., the Collection of Evidence, scores on college admissions tests, and grade comparisons with students who do meet standard).
 - An appeal process is in place for parents/students who question the results of their individual HSPE.

✓ **At any grade level**, make sure parents understand that:

- The lack of information about their child's performance on a key assessment like the MSP/HSPE may hinder school personnel in making the best decisions about the child's instructional needs.
- Among other assessment information, MSP/HSPE results are used for instructional planning and are considered when placing students in special programs designed to address individual students' needs.
- Students should get the practice of taking the test in the earlier grades for familiarity and confidence building for when they take the HSPE as a graduation requirement.
- Student Learning Plans (SLPs) are written for students in grades 5 and above to address students' needs in areas in which they did not meet standard on the state assessment. The purpose of the SLP is to outline the steps needed to build success for the student. For students who do not take the state assessment, no SLP is developed.
- When a student or parent refuses the student's participation in the state assessment, the result is counted as the student having "not met standard" on the school, district, and state results (but is listed as "not tested" for the individual student).
- Schools and teachers are not required to create a distinct curriculum for students whose parents have asked that they not be tested on the state assessment. Schools are not obligated to provide an alternate curriculum or other lessons to students refusing testing during the time the state assessment is being administered. However, schools must provide supervision for students who are not testing for any reason.

Checklist of Steps to Follow if Student or Parent Refuses the State Assessment

- Every school should designate one staff person who has lead responsibility for handling state assessment refusals. This might be the principal, assistant principal, counselor, building test coordinator, lead teacher, or anyone who becomes highly knowledgeable about the issues involved and feels comfortable talking with parents and students about these issues. The district Assessment Director is always available to help in these discussions.

Student Refusal

- If a student refuses to take one or more subtests, a teacher or staff person who knows this student and is comfortable with the issues should talk with the student and try to ascertain why the student is refusing. (See page 3 of this document for possible reasons students refuse.)
- If the student continues to refuse, the staff person designated to handle refusals should contact the student's parent(s).
- Explain to the parent the importance of the student taking the test. Hopefully, the parent will help convince the student to take the test. If not, follow the steps under Parent Refusal.

Parent Refusal

- If a parent refuses for his/her child to take the state assessment, the school contact person should try to ascertain the reasons for this refusal. (See page 4 of this document for suggestions.)
- Discuss the benefits of students taking the state assessment and consequences for not taking it. (See pages 4-5 and 7 of this document.)
- Show the parent some released items and explain that the parent can arrange to see their child's completed test after scoring. (See page 4 of this document for procedures to follow.)

- If the parent continues to refuse to allow the student to take the state assessment, have him/her complete the State Assessment Refusal Documentation Form. (A copy of this form is included at the end of this document.) Make sure to print the following Benefits and Consequences sheet on the back of the Documentation Form before having the parent sign it.
- Put the completed form in the student's school folder to document why the student does not have a score. If parents refuse to sign this form, try to get them to put their refusal in writing, including their reason for refusing. If parents will not put their refusal in writing, document your attempts.
- Bubble in the Y next to "REFUSED" on the back cover (the demographic page) of the student's state assessment test booklets for all subtests that the parent refused for the student to take.

Benefits for Students Taking the State Assessment (MSP/HSPE)

- ✓ The MSP and HSPE assess critical Grade-Level Expectations (GLEs), including higher-level thinking, communication, reasoning, problem solving, and application of knowledge and skills in new situations. In other words, students can show what they know and can do in formats that allow them to construct their own responses (rather than just choosing the best option from pre-determined choices).
- ✓ Teachers and staff can gain information about students' progress toward meeting grade-level expectations (what students should know and be able to do) in the core academic areas of reading, writing, math, and science, and can plan instruction accordingly.
- ✓ By taking the Measurements of Student Progress (MSP) in grades 3-8, students become familiar with the test and have several chances to get feedback on their performance, before taking the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE) as a graduation requirement.
- ✓ Each student's MSP/HSPE performance provides a profile of the student's strengths and weak areas in each subject area tested. For students in Grades 5 and above, a Student Learning Plan is developed to address areas in which the student did not meet standard, outlining appropriate instructional strategies.
- ✓ Through a request to the state, parents can view their child's answers on their completed MSP/HSPE booklets to gain a deeper understanding of how their child is progressing on state standards.
- ✓ Because the state assessment assesses students' progress toward meeting standards, information regarding the performance of district groups of students can help district staff make decisions about the effectiveness of various instructional programs.

Benefits for Students Taking the WAAS-Portfolio (alternative for students with significant cognitive disabilities)

- ✓ The student's growth on key learning targets is documented three times a year, showing the student's progress toward state standards.
- ✓ The evidence submitted in a portfolio ensures that students with the most intensive disabilities have an opportunity to "show what they know" and to receive instruction at a level that is challenging and attainable.

Consequences When Students Do Not Take the State Assessment (MSP/HSPE/WAAS-Portfolio)

- ✓ **Students in the class of 2008 and later who do not pass the High School state assessment in Reading and Writing or an approved alternative will not receive a high school diploma. Students who have not passed the High School state assessment in Math and who do not earn 2.0 math credits after 10th grade will not receive a diploma.**
- ✓ Teachers and staff lack full information about the instructional needs of students who do not take the state assessment, which could lead to some students not receiving all the instructional support they might need to be successful later in school.
- ✓ When a student has not taken the MSP/HSPE, schools lack the necessary information to develop a Student Learning Plan for that student.
- ✓ Students who do not take the MSP prior to Grade 10 will not have had the opportunity to practice and get feedback before taking the High School state assessment as a graduation requirement.

State Assessment Refusal Documentation Form

Please print the following information:

Student's Name _____
Parent/Guardian's Name _____
School _____
Student's Grade Level _____
Date of Assessment _____

As the parent/guardian of the above named student, I choose for my child to not participate in the Washington state assessment. I choose for him/her to not participate in: (*check one*):

the entire MSP or HSPE _____
the entire WAAS-Portfolio _____
certain subtests: _____ please specify: _____
(Reading, Writing, Math, Science)

My reason for this decision is: _____

I have read and understand the benefits and consequences listed on the back of this form.

In particular, I understand that:

- ✓ If my child does not pass the High School state assessment in Reading and Writing or an approved alternative, my child will not be able to obtain a high school diploma.
- ✓ If my child has not passed the High School state assessment in Math and does not earn 2.0 math credits past 10th grade, my child will not be able to obtain a high school diploma.
- ✓ Practice on the Measurements of Student Progress (MSP) at younger grades can help students show their best performance on the High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE).

Signature of Parent/Guardian: _____

Date Signed: _____

School Representative: _____

This form is to be filed within the student's cumulative record located at the school building. The test booklet must be marked REFUSED for all relevant test sections.