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**[4j\_announce] State Testing & Student Opt-Outs: FAQs for Staff**

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**Sender :** 4j announce-bounces <4j\_announce-bounces@4j.lane.edu>**Subject :** [4j\_announce] State Testing & Student Opt-Outs: FAQs for Staff**To :** 4j announce <4j\_announce@4j.lane.edu>

A MESSAGE FROM THE 4J INSTRUCTION DEPARTMENT

Dear colleagues,

The annual state testing period is beginning. Many teachers and other staff have questions about state testing and changes in parents' options to opt out. Please read below for important information for all staff, particularly the staff communication guidelines at the end.

**About State Tests:****Which students complete state tests?**

Students complete statewide assessments of their learning in math and English language arts in grades 3–8 and 11. Statewide science assessments are completed once at each school level, typically in grades 5, 8 and 11. This is a federal requirement for all U.S. public schools.

**When will state tests be administered?**

The statewide testing window for math and English language arts is Feb. 9–June 10 and for science is Jan. 5–June 10, but 4J schools generally will test a little later in that period.

- **High schools:** Juniors will complete state tests in their second term of math, language arts and science classes. For students completing their second term of a subject in Trimester 2, this window is Feb. 22–March 11. For students completing their second term of a subject in Trimester 3, this window is May 16–June 3.

- **Middle schools:** Students will complete state tests in a four-week window between April 22 and May 20.

- **Elementary schools:** Schools are encouraged to wait until later in the testing window, but each school determines the testing time that works best for them. Generally, fifth graders may complete science testing before spring break. Third, fourth

and fifth graders may complete math and English language arts testing later in the spring.

### **About Opting Out of State Tests:**

#### **Can parents exempt (opt out) their children from completing state tests in 2015–16?**

Yes. Parents and adult students (18 and older) may annually opt out of completing state tests. Non-adult students may not opt out on their own; their parent must sign the request.

#### **Have families been informed about how to opt out of the Smarter Balanced assessments?**

Yes. All families were sent a phone message and email with information about state testing and how to opt out, with the opt-out form attached. Spanish-speaking parents received the phone message, email and form in Spanish. The opt-out form and information about state testing is also available in multiple languages on the school district's website, and each school office has a supply of printed forms to accommodate families who do not get email or do not have printing capabilities at home.

#### **What is the process for parents to opt out of state tests?**

The exemption / opt-out process changed this year due to House Bill 2655:

- **Math & ELA:** To opt out of the 2015–16 state tests of **English language arts** and/or **math** (the **Smarter Balanced** assessments, as well as the **Oregon Extended Assessment** that certain students with disabilities complete instead), parents and adult students may complete the state testing opt-out form and return it to the student's school office. This is a statewide form. It has been sent to parents in English and Spanish, is available in multiple languages on the school district's and state's websites, and is available in hardcopy in the school office.

- **Science:** There is no form to opt out of the **OAKS Science** assessment, which students complete in grades 5, 8 and 11. It is still subject to previous provisions: If parents wish to opt out, they should send a letter requesting to opt out explaining the reason based on the student's religion or disability.

#### **Do testing opt-outs carry forward from year to year?**

No. If a parent wants to have their child not participate in state testing in a given school year, they must submit a request to opt out for that year.

#### **Is there a deadline for turning in opt-out forms?**

No. The opt-out form encourages parents to return forms by February 1, 2016, and it is better for schools to receive forms before testing begins, but forms will be accepted any time during the testing window. More details about this will be sent to test administrators.

### **Staff Communication Guidelines:**

**Should teachers and staff proactively notify students or parents about the option to opt out?**

No. Families have already been informed about the option to opt out.

**May teachers and other staff respond to questions about testing and opting out?**

Yes. Provide neutral, factual information. Direct students or parents to the state testing notice and opt-out form located on the 4J website and in the school office. A few examples of potential questions and answers are provided below.

**May teachers and staff encourage students or parents to opt out?**

No. District employees may not encourage or advise opting out during their work hours. The appropriate role of test administrators and other staff members is to administer state tests as required by the U.S., the state, and the district, and to respond neutrally to student- and parent-initiated questions, but not to themselves initiate conversations about opting out or advocate doing so.

**May staff use work time, district email or other district resources to advocate for opting out?**

No. District employees may not use work time or district resources, such as district email or facilities, to advocate that parents opt out their children.

**Outside of work hours, may teachers and other staff express their opinions publicly about standardized tests or about opting out?**

Yes. As private individuals during non-working hours and not using district resources, teachers and other staff have a free speech right to express their opinions for or against standardized tests in personal conversations and in public forums (on the soccer sidelines, in public comment at school board meetings, in testimony to legislators, in letters to the editor, etc.).

**How should teachers and other staff respond to questions about testing and opting out?**

Here are a few examples of likely questions and suggested neutral responses:

**Q:** "Do I have to take the state tests?"

**A:** "Most students take state tests. If you don't want to participate, talk to your parents. If your parents think you shouldn't take the test, they can send in a form to the school office."

**Q:** "Should I opt out my child from state tests?"

**A:** "That's up to each family to decide. Most students take state tests, but students aren't required to participate if their parents don't want them to. You can find information about state testing and how to opt out on the school district's website or in the school office."

**Q:** Elementary & Middle School: "What will happen if my child doesn't take the state tests?"

**A:** "Most students take state tests, but parents can choose to opt out. Students who don't participate in state testing will have supervised study time instead."

**Q:** High School: "What will happen if my student doesn't take the state tests?"

**A:** "Most students take state tests, but parents can choose to opt out. Students who don't participate in state testing will have supervised study time instead. The state tests are the main way students meet Oregon's 'essential skills' graduation requirements. High school students who opt out of state tests will need to take a different standardized test or take an extra class to produce scored work samples in order to meet these requirements to graduate from high school."

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Thank you for your attention and for all of your efforts.

**Randy Bernstein**, Director of Secondary Education

**Sara Green**, Director of Elementary Education

Instruction Department  
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