



## National PTA Assessment Position Statement Guidance for PTA Leaders

Updated March 2021

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In the middle of the 2019-2020 school year, an unprecedented crisis – the COVID-19 pandemic – disrupted the public education system throughout the United States. Educators, students, and families had to quickly adapt to a new normal that in many cases included daily virtual learning from home and new public health protocols with in-person instruction. As spring 2021 approached, states began to explore how they might safely administer statewide annual assessments for the 2020-2021 school year, informed in part by [guidance](#) released by the U.S. Department of Education encouraging states proceed with their annual assessments while also calling for flexibility in the administration of those assessments.

In February of 2021, the National PTA Board of Directors reacted to this crisis by calling an emergency meeting to discuss 2020-2021 school year assessments and to review the existing PTA position statement on assessments that had been adopted in 2016. The National PTA Board of Directors discussed at length the continuing challenges faced by educators, students and families, the testing flexibilities that states could adopt to address some of these challenges, and the continued importance of annual assessments. The National PTA Board of Directors considered perspectives and concerns from state PTA leaders, National PTA Government Affairs staff, and the civil rights community in evaluating the short and long term impact of 2021 assessments on educators, students and families.

In order to balance the continued importance of assessments with the need for flexibility during a crisis, the National PTA Board of Directors decided to adopt two new recommendations to be added to PTA's position statement on assessments:

- *"In the event of a national emergency or crisis that disrupts the public education system, local, state, and federal authorities should allow for flexibility in the delivery and administration of assessments."*
- *"Assessments must accommodate the needs of all students, effectively address digital and connectivity issues to ensure equity and adhere to the most recent federal health and safety guidelines."*

National PTA continues to believe in the importance of assessments during the 2020-2021 school year to evaluate and address student learning loss, while also recognizing the need for flexibility on how best to assess our students during times of crisis. The updated position statement would ensure all students are treated equitably and tested in a safe environment, and would allow for important flexibility in test administration like delaying assessments until the Fall so all students have access to in-person testing or administering a shortened, digital version of assessments in the Spring. In all cases, the parent and family voice must be engaged when considering the best options for school districts to move forward on assessments.

This document provides additional contextual information on the original adoption of the assessment position statement in 2016 and the language added to the position statement in early 2021 by the

National PTA Board of Directors. PTA leaders are encouraged to use this document to guide their responses to membership, partner organizations and stakeholders concerning the position statement.

If you have any questions regarding the position statement on assessments, please contact Amanda Lowe, Director of Government Affairs for National PTA, at [alowe@pta.org](mailto:alowe@pta.org). In the event media inquiries are received about the statement, please direct them to Heidi May Wilson, Senior Manager of Media Relations for National PTA, at [hmay@pta.org](mailto:hmay@pta.org).

### **Rationale for Assessment Position Statement**

Prior to 2016, National PTA had last adopted a Student Assessment and Testing position statement in 1981. Over the last few years, the use of assessments has increasingly become a prevalent topic of concern for parents, and movements to opt children out of assessments have gained some momentum. By adopting this position statement, the elected leadership of PTA has embraced an issue that is of concern to many parents, educators and students across the country. While there is not universal agreement on the issue of assessment, National PTA is in alignment with a diverse group of associations and organizations, including the U.S. Chamber of Commerce and the Leadership Council on Civil and Human Rights, among many others. Furthermore, as implementation continues on the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA,) it is imperative for National PTA to provide guidance on assessment.

### **Development of Assessment Position Statement**

Collectively, the 2016 position statement was shaped by PTA volunteers and elected leadership representing 24 states across the country. The duly elected leadership--National PTA Board of Directors--thoroughly reviewed and approved the statement at its January 2016 meeting. The Legislation Committee and PTA volunteer leadership sought to ensure the language of the position statement is representative of the mission, values and priorities of National PTA. The principles articulated clearly prioritize the needs of *all* students, which includes high-quality instruction, continuous improvement and family-school collaboration. Numerous source materials were consulted on the subject of assessment systems and student participation in the context of the current policy environment, including federal and state statutes and proposed policies and research findings. The Board of Directors and Legislation Committee also carefully accounted for any past or ongoing activity of state PTA congresses on assessment to ensure the resulting language would provide national leadership and guidance and support all students.

In February of 2021, the National PTA Board of Directors called for an emergency meeting to review the position statement on assessments, in light of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic. At that meeting, National PTA's Board of Directors approved two amendments to the 2016 position statement that was collaboratively developed by National PTA's Legislation Committee with input and insight from volunteers.

### **What Does the Position Statement Say about Assessment Systems and Student Participation?**

National PTA acknowledges the important role that high-quality assessments play in promoting equity, providing parents, teachers and school leaders with valuable information about student growth and achievement and improving outcomes for all of our nation's children. At the same time, National PTA recognizes the concerns many parents and educators have about the overemphasis on testing and the impact it has on teaching and learning.

Many states are working to implement high-quality assessment systems that seek to provide critical information to parents, students and educators. The position statement provides numerous recommendations on how states and school districts can improve assessments and reduce the amount of required tests. The recommendations include audits of assessment systems to eliminate unnecessary tests; ensure appropriate development, reliability and implementation of high-quality assessments; allow for clear and multiple means of communication and engagement with families on assessment; improve the

timeliness and comprehension of assessment results; and provide adequate professional development to educators on the development, use and evaluation of assessments and the data they provide.

National PTA has a long-standing and unaltered position on the use and overreliance of high-stakes, summative assessments as they pertain to student learning and achievement. While the Student Assessment and Testing position statement (1981) was retired with the passage of the 2016 position statement, the position statement still includes language on National PTA's well-established stance against the use of high-stakes testing. The position statement articulates that PTA supports state assessment systems that are appropriately aligned with each state's academic standards. Furthermore, the statement outlines that a sound and comprehensive assessment system should include multiple measures of student growth and achievement that reflect the knowledge and skills students need when they graduate to ensure they are ready for college and the workplace.

The use of summative state assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic has increasingly become a prevalent topic of concern for National PTA and PTA members across the country. In response to these concerns, the National PTA Board of Directors approved language to be added to the 2016 position statement in February of 2021. These two amendments to the 2016 position statement on assessment offer PTA members guidance to continue to advocate equitably for all children. It is important to note that the two amendments to the 2016 position statement on assessment do not alter the intent of, nor do they nullify the 2016 position statement. Rather, the two amendments address the needs of student safety and clarify National PTA's position on the administration of assessments during a national emergency or crisis. National PTA continues to believe that summative assessments remain an important tool for measuring student outcomes and evaluating learning loss.

National PTA believes assessments are essential to ensure all students receive a high-quality education and help guide instruction to better meet the needs of students. The association maintains that in order to provide the most accurate information to parents, educators, schools, the district and the state all students must participate in state required assessments. The information gathered from assessments helps to make sure students and schools are receiving the necessary resources and supports in order to reach their full potential. Both the position statement and ESSA acknowledge that states can have policies that provide a mechanism for parents to opt their children out from state-mandated assessments. However, the position statement indicates that National PTA does not support these types of policies. While some state policies allow for opt-out, the association does not believe that opting out is an effective strategy to address the frustration over testing. A blanket, mass opt-out of state-required assessments is not supported by National PTA.

PTA has always held that it is the right of parents to decide what is best for their child. As PTA's mission is on behalf of all children, and we continue to support parent's rights, it would be contrary to the association's mission to support or promote a strategy that does not consider the rights or consequences of that strategy for *all* children. National PTA has always believed that educational improvements and increased well-being for our nation's children comes from engaged and empowered parents and families. The parent voice is critical in the discussion around educational equity, and we strongly advocate and continue to support increased inclusion of the parent voice in educational decision making at all levels. Parents and families must be at the table when policymakers are considering policies that affect students.

### **Communicating about the Assessment Position Statement with Members, Partners and other Audiences**

- When used appropriately, assessments provide much-needed information that is used to guide instruction to better meet the needs of students and ensure necessary resources and supports are provided to improve outcomes for all children. Having annual data is critical to support school

improvement efforts, promote equity and make sure every student graduates ready for postsecondary education and the workforce.

- While the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for flexibility in the delivery and administration of assessments, a blanket waiver or mass opt-out of state-required assessments would come at a real cost to the goals of educational equity and the educational success of all children. By allowing students to be opted out of statewide assessments, parents lose a tool in evaluating the progress their child is making each year, teachers lose the ability to assess and correct weak spots in their instructional plans, communities lose the knowledge of whether or not their school is meeting students' needs, and school and state leaders lose the reliable data they depend on to make critical decisions about how to better support students in the future.
- [A national survey](#) exploring parents' views on end-of-the-year state assessments during the COVID-19 pandemic found that the majority of parents support end-of-year state assessments with modifications and resources. The study found that 52% of parents favor end-of-year testing in Spring 2021 to measure the impact of the pandemic on student learning, while only 24% oppose end-of-year state assessments this spring. The 2021 study also found that 60% of parents are worried their child is behind and want more information about where their child is academically.
- If only certain students are tested, it could very well mask the real performance of the nation's public schools and have a disparate impact on minorities, students with disabilities and English language learners. Failing to include all students in the assessment system would mean that some learners would not be counted. As a result, the needs of all students would not be known and their needs would not be met.
- Full participation in assessments provides complete data sets for educators, school leaders, districts and states. If all students don't participate in assessments, we lose valuable data that identifies where there are disparities in opportunities and outcomes for all students. Furthermore, non-participation can affect the achievement results for the school and misrepresent achievement gaps among various student populations. Non-participation in assessments can disproportionately affect the students who are in greatest need of additional academic and non-academic supports and further exacerbate resource equities that currently exist.
- We must include all children. This principle applies in the Census and elsewhere. You need to be counted – and visible – in order to be heard. Allowing schools to not be accountable for all children (e.g. children with disabilities or English learners) by opting them out of assessments, or encouraging them to not participate means that their needs are less likely to be met.
- Results from high-quality assessment give teachers a robust reading of every student's aptitude, allowing them to spend less time analyzing students' progress and more time on figuring out how to support their students' learning. The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) is [committed](#) to ensuring states have high-quality assessments and has also produced a [document](#) to support the appropriate selection and evaluation of high-quality assessments.
- High-quality assessments measure the knowledge and skills that are part of regular classroom instruction such as asking students to think critically, analyze information, and explain their answers.
- Parents and educators alike should have meaningful data on student learning and progress. This is especially important to help our teachers tailor their instruction to students and address COVID-19

learning gaps; help identify the supports students need from their school, teachers and family; help parents and teachers work together to address learning loss and support students' success; and help parents better support their children's learning at home. Statewide assessments are one of multiple measures—including benchmark tests, classroom-based tests, report card grades and teacher observations—that, when combined, help give a clearer picture of where children are academically and help equip parents to effectively advocate on behalf of their child's learning.

### **Related Resources and Research**

- [U.S. Department of Education Guidance to States on Assessing Student Learning During the Pandemic](#) (February 22, 2021)
- [Coalition Letter to Incoming Administration on the Anniversary of ESSA](#) (December 10, 2020)
- [Coalition Letter to Incoming Secretary of Education on Assessment Waivers](#) (February 3, 2021)
- [PTA Position Statement on the Reopening of Public PreK-12 Schools](#) (June 2020)
- [National Survey of Parents' Views on Assessments During the COVID-19 Pandemic](#) (February 2021)
- [U.S. Department of Education COVID-19 Handbook Volume 1: Strategies for Safely Reopening Elementary and Secondary Schools](#) (February 12, 2021)
- [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention Operational Strategy for K-12 Schools through Phased Mitigation](#) (February 24, 2021)
- [U.S. Department of Education Dear Colleague Letter to Reduce and Improve Testing](#) (February 2, 2016)
- [U.S. Department of Education Dear Colleague letter on assessment participation rates](#) (December 22, 2015)
- [Opt Out Policies by State](#), National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE)
- [Responding to Opt Out Requests: The Opportunity for State Boards](#), NASBE
- [Opt Out Guidance State by State](#), NASBE (included at the end of this document)
- [Knowing the Score: The Who, What, and Why of Testing](#), Center on Education Policy
- [State Opt Out Legislation in 2015](#), National Conference of State Legislatures
- [Civil Rights Groups: "We Oppose Anti-Testing Efforts"](#)
- [Testing Provides Critical Information](#), Phi Delta Kappa
- [Why civil rights groups say parents who opt out of tests are hurting kids](#), The Washington Post
- [Student Testing in America's Great City Schools: An Inventory and Preliminary Analysis](#), Council of the Great City Schools
- [Testing Overload in America's Schools](#), Center for American Progress (CAP)
- [Implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act: Toward a Coherent, Aligned Assessment System](#), CAP
- [The 47th Annual PDK/Gallup Poll of the Public's Attitudes Toward the Public Schools](#)
- [The 2015 EdNext Poll on School Reform: Public thinking on testing, opt out, common core, unions, and more](#)
- [Education Post Poll: National attitudes around education issues, improvements and institutions](#)
- [Student Assessment Inventory for School Districts](#), Achieve
- [Comprehensive Statewide Assessment Systems: A Framework for the Role of the State Education Agency in Improving Quality and Reducing Burden](#), Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)
- [Assessment Quality Principles](#), (CCSSO)
- [Criteria for High-Quality Assessments](#), (CCSSO)

### **Partial List of Organizations that also Support Full Student Participation in State Assessments**

The American Association of University Women (AAUW)  
Association of University Centers on Disabilities (AUCD)  
Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO)

Council of Parent Attorneys and Advocates, Inc. (COPAA)  
Disability Rights Education and Defense Fund (DREDF)  
Education Trust  
The Leadership Conference on Civil and Human Rights  
League of United Latin American Citizens (LULAC)  
NAACP  
National Council of La Raza (NCLR)  
National Disability Rights Network (NDRN)  
National Urban League (NUL)  
Southeast Asia Resource Action Center (SEARAC)  
TASH  
The U.S. Chamber of Commerce