

OPT IN.

Think twice before opting out.

The decision by schools to not administer the Smarter Balanced tests to 11th graders can be detrimental to students in a couple of ways.

FIRST, students who score a 3 or 4 on the tests have shown their readiness for college. Those students will automatically be placed in college-level math and English language classes, thanks to an agreement with the state community and technical colleges and public four-year universities. This will save students the need for placement tests, and save families the cost of students taking remedial courses.

SECOND, students who score a 2 on the tests have shown that they need additional help. Bridge to College Mathematics and Bridge to College English courses have been developed. A student who gets a “B” or better in those courses also will automatically be placed in college-level math and English courses. (Districts are applying now to teach the courses, so we don’t know yet which schools will be offering them in the fall.)

IT’S ALSO IMPORTANT TO UNDERSTAND that the tests measure career and college readiness. So students who score a 1 or 2 will need an additional course or courses to be ready for life after high school, whether it’s college or career.

NOT HAVING STUDENTS TAKE THE NEW TESTS robs educators of a fair and equitable measure of student progress. They won’t be able to see gaps between groups of students, which means the students who most need help may not get it.

BEYOND THE CONSEQUENCES TO STUDENTS, One school’s decision could have statewide effects. The U.S. Department of Education recently sent a letter to Illinois about possible effects. Washington state receives federal education funds on the condition that federal laws are followed. If a school decides not to follow federal law, it isn’t unreasonable to think that federal money might be withheld.

THERE ARE ALSO CONSEQUENCES to teachers, who are subject to the State Code of Professional Conduct. State code considers it an act of “unprofessional conduct” when a teacher act “in flagrant disregard” of a number of professional practices, including testing.

FINALLY, State Superintendent Randy Dorn does sympathize with the overriding concern about overtesting. To that end, he has proposed a bill that would eliminate the requirement that students pass exams to graduate from high school.

Source: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction

