



# Harvey Public Schools

*"Striving for Excellence"*

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Re: Testing, Data & Opting Out

Dear Parents & Patrons,

State and Federal law, as well as best practices, requires students be assessed in school for a variety of reasons. Consequently, we utilize a number of different assessment instruments, some are elective while others are required to achieve our goals. Parents may elect to opt their student(s) out of any/all of these assessments; however, there are ramifications and consequences for the student, the school, and the District when those decisions are made. Parents need to be fully aware of each test we administer, its purpose, and the ramifications of opting out. Therefore, I am writing to you to address each of these issues.

The following are the currently administered assessments in our schools, the targeted age group(s), and a description of each:

- **NWEA** (*Northwest Evaluation Association*) ~ Also known as MAP (*Measure of Academic Progress*), this is an interim assessment system utilized at least two times per year for Grades 7-11, and three times per year for Grades 1-6 (*kindergarten takes in the Spring for the first time*) that measures what matters most so teachers can support academic growth and skill mastery for each student in their classrooms. We utilize testing in Math, Reading/English Language Arts, and now Science. These tests illuminate each student's academic progress and learning needs, helping teachers target instruction to students and principals to make well-informed system-wide decisions.
- **STAR** ~ Administered to Grades K-6, the purpose of STAR is to assess basic Reading/English Language Arts and Math skills. This interim assessment is administered 3 times/ year in the Elementary and is designed to be a relatively brief means (*app. 20-30 minutes*) of progress monitoring students to make sure each student is growing academically in each of these two fundamental curricular areas. We are also able to administer these assessments with new students who arrive in our District to determine their fundamental strengths & weaknesses in each of these core curricular areas. This assessment is utilized as one of the determinants of Title I services at our Elementary School. The District picks up the cost of this test, and this was born out of a recent AdvancED visitation as we previously had no standardized mechanism in place to assess math skills in grades K-2. Although we originally needed this assessment for K-2, we now use this K-6 so we can have the same sort of data school-wide to inform instruction.
- **NAEP** (*National Assessment of Educational Progress* ~ *the results are known as the nation's report card*) ~ This assessment is administered to Grades 4 & 8 across America and is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of what America's students know and can do in various subject areas. Assessments are conducted annually in math and reading and NAEP results serve as a common metric for all states. The assessment stays essentially the same from year to year which permits NAEP to provide a clear picture of student academic progress over time.
- **Smarter Balance** ~ This assessment piece is relatively new, but the North Dakota State Assessment (*NDSA*) has been around for years. According to ND Century Code, this must be administered annually (*it is now a spring test*) to grades 3-8 & 10 (*after this fall, this test will no longer be administered to a high school grade as the ACT will be our test of choice for high school students*) to assess students and their mastery of North Dakota State Standards in the areas of English Language Arts, Math & Science. Most schools in ND are taking this on computer, but we

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always opted for a paper/pencil version at Harvey Public Schools. This assessment determines not only each student's proficiency level, but also the status of our Schools' & School District's Performance. The State picks up the cost of this test.

- **ACT-Aspire** ~ Utilized in grades 8 & 10 for the first time in Fall '14, this assessment is a precursor to the ACT and, in conjunction with a career interest inventory, meets a state legal requirement of providing an assessment for Career and Technical Education (CTE) planning required for grades 7 & 8 and 9 & 10. Similar to the ACT, tests are offered in core subject matter and results are provided in a fashion predicting future performance on the ACT. This test replaces the PLAN and EXPLORE Tests which were used for years in our School District. The District picks up the cost of this test.
- **PSAT (pre-Scholastic Aptitude Test)** ~ Co-sponsored by the College Board and National Merit Scholarship Corporation, this assessment is annually administered to Juniors in the fall of the school year. The PSAT assesses the critical reading, mathematics, and writing skills students need for college and beyond, and provides students detailed feedback on skills, access to scholarships, and personalized online tools for improvement. The District picks up the cost of this test.
- **ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery)** ~ This is a multiple choice test, administered by the United States Military, and is used to predict future academic and occupational success in the military and is administered annually to juniors sometime in the middle of the year. There is no cost for this test.
- **ACT (American College Test)** ~ The ACT is a curriculum and standards-based educational and career planning tool that assesses students' academic readiness for college. The ACT consists of multiple-choice tests in English, Mathematics, Reading, and Science. There is also an optional Writing test (*required when administered in school*). This is a fundamental pre-requisite for college admission most anywhere and is, by NDCC, administered to all juniors (*no cost to students*) in North Dakota on a school day during the spring of each year. It can also be optionally taken or re-taken during grades 10-12 (*app. \$65 cost to student*). This is one of two tests (*WorkKeys is the other*) that qualifies students for the North Dakota State Scholarship (\$6,000) provided they earn a composite score of 24 and comply with all other scholarship requirements, which are printed in our Student Handbook and shared with students and parents regularly.
- **WorkKeys** ~ A product of ACT, WorkKeys is a job skills assessment system that offers computerized tests in the following three areas: Applied Math, Reading for Information, and Locating Information. This is the other test (*along with ACT*) students may use to qualify for the North Dakota State Scholarship (\$6,000) provided they earn at least a 5 on each of the three tests, and comply with all other scholarship requirements, which are printed in our Student Handbook and shared with students and parents regularly. We administer these tests to all seniors. Also, these are tests one would likely encounter if one walked into any Job Service in America seeking employment, and our students will have already taken them here at HHS. The District picks up the cost of this test.

As you can hopefully conclude, every assessment we administer has a purpose and serves a unique role in the education, advancement, and opportunities of each of our students. Furthermore, the results, one way or another, are utilized for something important, most often to inform educational decisions at the local school level, but also to determine student academic growth, gain acceptance to a college/university or a career path, or as a qualification for virtually any scholarship.

Now that you know what assessments we utilize, or are administered to our students through school as an extension of government, what happens if your student opts-out of any particular test? First of all, it is probably best to place each of these assessment into the following three categories, even though some assessments may fit more than one category:

1. Informs local instruction (*STAR, Smarter Balance, ACT, ACT-Aspire, PSAT, WorkKeys*)
2. Benefits the student directly (*ACT, ACT-Aspire, PSAT, WorkKeys*)
3. Provides information to the state or federal government (*ASVAB. NAEP, Smarter Balance*)

The most significant consequence of opting your student out of testing is the negative effect it will have on your student's teacher(s) and their ability to gauge where your student is at and what interventions, if necessary, are required to get your student to grade level and/or beyond. Many of these intervention services (*Title I, Special Education, and/or Supplementary Educational Services*) have eligibility requirements to ensure the services are made available to those who need them most. Therefore, parents need to fully understand they may be limiting their student from participating in supplemental programs that may very well enable them to succeed in school.

Furthermore, a large part of our accreditation as a school and District, is related to our use of data, or information, to inform local educational decision-making enabling our School District to ultimately best

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meet the needs of our student population. Therefore, if we have an inordinate number of students opting out either now or in the future, our data will no longer be either reliable or valid in assisting us with making informed educational decisions for the school's student population as a whole. Also, when it comes to local School Improvement efforts, we use data results from all of the tests listed except for the ACT-Aspire, ASVAB, NAEP, and PSAT.

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (*ESEA*), requires students be assessed with a standardized state assessment. This is the basis for the current use of the Smarter Balance Assessment. One of the Fed's fundamental rules is that each school have a minimum of 95% of eligible students participate in the assessment. This is a statistical requirement to ensure data validity and that results represent the students eligible to take the assessment. Schools that cannot demonstrate 95% of eligible students participated in the assessment will be unable to have "*reliable*" data.

Lastly, the ACT, WorkKeys, and PSAT are all paths to various scholarships, not to mention that without the ACT (*or the SAT if you are seeking higher education in other parts of the country*), it will be nearly impossible to gain admission to almost any "*accredited*" institution of higher learning in America. There may be a few institutions that use their own assessment for admission, but in my travels, I don't know of *ANY* firsthand.

I thank you for taking the time to read this information, and I hope it will assist you with making an informed, educated choice when it comes to the testing your student is subjected to in school. Remember, we're on the same team, and our mission is to make a positive difference in the lives of all of our students and provide every student with valuable educational experiences that will last a lifetime. Beyond that, at Harvey Public Schools, we simply want our students to have access to the opportunities they seek in adulthood. If you have any questions, comments, or concerns, please do not hesitate to contact me at 701-324-2267 (W), 701-341-0600 (C), or via e-mail at [daniel.stutlien@k12.nd.us](mailto:daniel.stutlien@k12.nd.us).

Sincerely,

*Daniel W. Stutlien*

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