

Can Parents Opt Their Children Out of the PSSA?

While all school districts are required by regulation and law to administer the PSSA assessment, Pennsylvania students do not have to take the assessment if the parents have a religious objection. In years previous to 1999, parents could opt their children out of taking the PSSA for any reason. The opt out provision as contained in the Chapter 4 education regulations is restrictive and simultaneously conflicts with the federal law of NCLB as it can have greater adverse implications toward a school or district from meeting Adequate Yearly Progress. While the opt-out requirements are restrictive to some degree, parents are given certain protections:

1. Parents are NOT required to specify a specific religious reason or objection.
2. Parents are NOT required to identify the part of the assessment that conflicts with their religious beliefs.
3. Schools requesting any parts of this information from parents or students are in violation of the Chapter 4 regulations.

The ramifications of those students choosing to opt out or intentionally perform poorly have an adverse effect on one's entire school district and community. The burden of conflict has been shifted by and from the State onto the backs of school districts to address with parents and students. Encouraging students to put forth their best effort has nothing to do with monetary gain, but, rather preventing the district from experiencing sanctions and the corrective intervention required for failing AYP. Schools are caught in the crossfire and simply cannot control how many students choose to opt out of an assessment, which again is based statutory and parental authority.