



The Education Trust

TESTING 101: A GUIDE FOR PARENTS



For more than a decade, states have been required to assess all students in grades 3-8 once per year, then once again in high school. These tests have been critical in helping parents know where their children are on state standards and in making sure that schools are accountable for all of their children. Now, Congress is considering two alternatives: one would change the frequency to once every three or four years, the other would allow school districts to choose their own tests, instead of a common statewide test. Here is a comparison of the three options:

| | Current Law: Annual Testing Grades 3-8 and Once in High School | Grade Span Testing: Once, Each, in Elementary, Middle, and High School | District Options: Annual Measurement Grades 3-8 and Once in High School, but Different Across Districts |
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| Who is tested? | Every child is assessed in grades 3-8 and once in high school. | States pick one grade in each span (for example, 4th, 8th and 11th grade) and test every child in that grade level. | Every child is assessed on state standards in grades 3-8 and once in high school, but the way of doing that will vary across different districts in a state. |
| How often will my child be tested? | Once every year in grades 3-8, then at least once again in high school. | Approximately every 3-4 years. | Once every year in grades 3-8, then at least once again in high school. |
| Is the test the same for all children in the same grade? | Yes. | Yes. | No. It must be "comparable," but not necessarily the same test. |
| Will it produce the data I need to help me choose the right school for my child? | Yes. You will be able to compare both performance and growth with every other school in your state. | No. You will only be able to see data on achievement for one grade level in a school, even though that school may serve as many as six grade levels. And you will not be able to find out how much children grow from entrance to exit. | No. Because the children in your school district (or charter school) may be assessed differently than those in your neighboring school district, you won't really be able to trust the data to help you choose the best school for your child. |
| If my child is behind, how long will it be before I can be sure he or she is back on track? | No more than one year. | At least 3 or 4 years. In between that, you will have to rely just on teacher grades. | No more than one year, though the definition of "on track" might vary between districts or schools. |