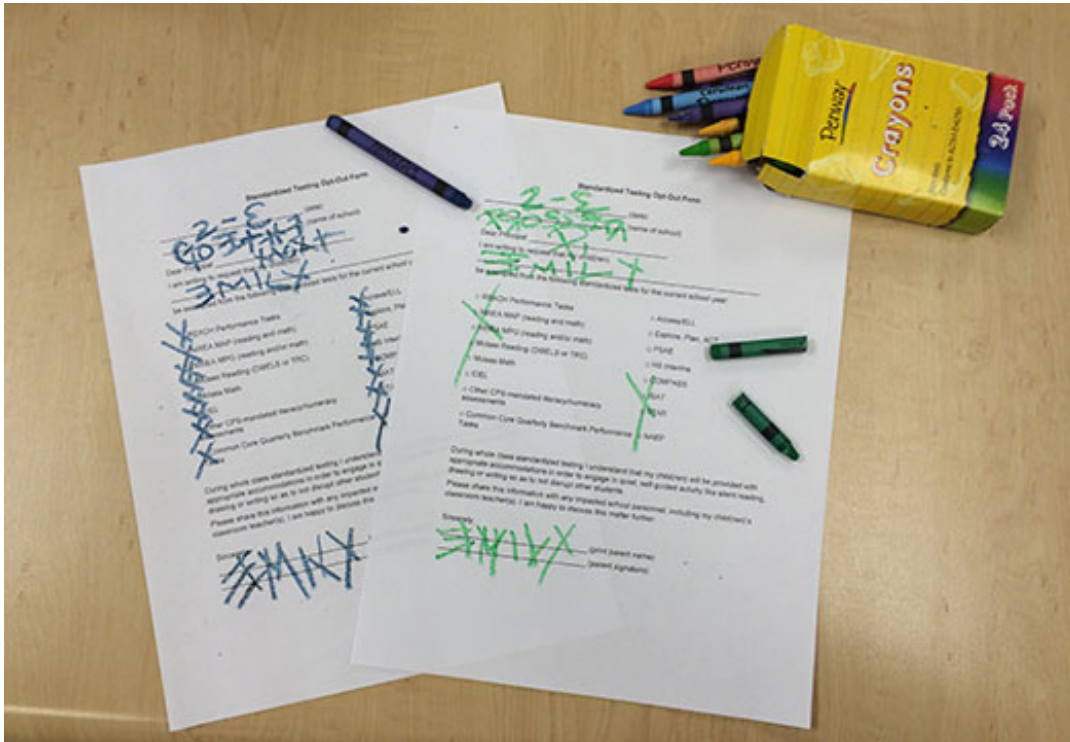


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Two universal standardized test opt-out forms. Photo Illustration by Emily Weinstein

To parents keeping score, CPS tests the limit of their patience for standardized testing

by **EMILY WEINSTEIN**
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As Chicago Public Schools' testing season nears, many parents and students plan to opt out of standardized assessments, despite CPS CEO Barbara Byrd-Bennett strongly advising against it.

"In addition to its direct impact on your child's progress," Byrd-Bennett said in a recent letter to CPS parents, "the NWEA MAP is a key element of teacher evaluation, principal evaluation, and the new School Quality Rating Policy, with low test participation lowering the overall school rating."

The letter, sent Jan. 29, was the second one Byrd-Bennett sent to CPS parents and guardians explaining consequences of opting out of standardized tests for students, teachers and schools.

"The fact that they need to send out two letters in under two months shows that they're nervous," CPS parent Cassandre Creswell said.

Creswell is a member of More Than A Score, a coalition of organizations that informs parents about opting out and encourages them to do so. She and many other parents found Byrd-Bennett's most recent letter to be "threatening and unfriendly."

Despite Byrd-Bennett's discouragement, many parents said they still feel their students are tested too often and are losing valuable learning time as a result.

"Parents who want to opt students out of testing are hopping mad," said Michelle Gunderson, a CPS teacher and Chicago Teachers Union vice president for elementary schools.

The two assessments getting the most attention are the Northwest Education Association Measurement of Academic Progress (NWEA) test and the Illinois Standards Achievement Test (ISAT).

The NWEA MAP results are “high-stakes,” meaning their results will determine students’ promotions from third, sixth and eighth grades; fifth and seventh grade students’ eligibility for selective enrollment schools; as well as teacher and principal evaluations, and school report card ratings.

The ISAT, however, is being phased out and will no longer be used after this year. Consequently, results will have no influence on students’ promotions, admissions or school performance levels. This is the test groups like More Than A Score strongly encourage parents to opt out of.

“We’re working against overuse and misuse of standardized testing,” Creswell said.

Byrd-Bennett ended her letter reminding parents and guardians to think hard and long about their decision and how it will affect their children: “I hope you will strongly consider the value of these assessments in providing your child with a high-quality education that will prepare her/him for college, career and life.”

More Than A Score is hosting a forum for parents 6:30-8 p.m. Thursday at Haas Park, 2402 N. Washtenaw Ave.