

This information sheet prepared by the [Waterbury Area Anti-Racism Coalition](#) (WAARC). To stay informed about future actions related specifically to standardized testing, [sign up here](#).

WAARC Position Statement

Statewide standardized testing for accountability is a mechanism of inequality and systemic racism. These tests are flawed in many ways, including the fact that they aren't culturally responsive. They have outsized influence on our education system, making it harder for schools to prioritize what is most important: relationships, belonging, and learning that is personally and socially meaningful. Additionally, these tests do not measure student growth in areas such as the creative arts, technical and hands-on subjects, and real-world community-centered projects.

The state of Vermont should design models for school accountability that do not rely on standardized tests. Due to the special circumstances of the pandemic, the data for this year is likely to be invalid and so the government has waived accountability and participation requirements, which makes this a perfect moment to have our voices heard without worry of negative consequences for our schools.

WAARC recommends that families have conversations about whether their children should refuse to take the tests to protect their own wellbeing and to send a message together that we demand transformative schooling aligned with our community's values.

Suggested Actions (see [infographic](#))

1. Inform yourself (for example, see the [10 myths](#) below)
2. Have [conversations](#) with your child(ren) about standardized testing
3. Choose whether to [opt out](#) of the tests this spring
4. Share with others – so they can make a choice too (feel free to share this doc)
5. Bonus – if you want to act further see [info and actions](#) prepared by WAARC and the VT Education Justice Coalition.

Information session on Wednesday, April 21, 7:00-8:00 (see [slides](#))

You can [see a recording of the event here](#). Highlights:

- Introduction with goals of session and WAARC position statement (0-4:20)
- Perspective: Alyssa Chen, Coordinator of the VT Education Justice Coalition (4:28-8:00)
- Perspective: Maia, Harwood Union High School 11th grader (8:20-13:20)
- How did we get here? VT context (13:20-18:20)
- Perspective: Juliette Longchamp, National Educators Association (18:30-23:10)
- Perspective: Rachel, Harwood Union High School 11th grader (23:40-28:30)
- What did we hear from the community? Survey summary (28:30-34:00)
- Perspectives: Clip from the [VT Digger Forum](#) of Celilo Bauman-Swain, Champlain Valley High School 12th grader, and Amanda Garces of the Vermont Human Rights Commission (34:00-40:40)
- Why to push back and steps to take (40:40-46:20)
- How to have conversations with your children (46:20-54:00)
- Perspective: Maroni Minter, graduate of Harwood Union High School and Director of WAARC (54:00-59:00)

Myths about Standardized Tests

1. *Standardized tests help advance equity.*
 - [Standardized testing has a racist history](#). Phenomena such as [stereotype threat](#) means that students from marginalized populations often underperform on tests. While the VT AOE Director of Testing noted recently that our statewide tests are not culturally responsive, the AOE has released helpful guidance on [ensuring local assessment systems are equitable and culturally responsive](#).
2. *We need statewide standardized tests to know how students did during the pandemic.*
 - Teachers have a handle on how their students are doing, using classroom assessments and much shorter standardized tests that produce more immediate results. [Statewide data will not be valid this year anyway according to VT AOE](#), and these overly simplistic tests won't capture our students' strengths or the gains they have made in areas like self-direction.
3. *It could hurt our schools or jeopardize funding if families and students refuse to take the tests.*
 - Since so many students will skip the tests due to virtual schooling (therefore likely making the data invalid), the federal government is relaxing accountability. No schools will get in trouble or lose funding due to low participation or low scores. Also [no schools have ever lost funding due to opt outs in "normal" years](#).
4. *Standardized tests give an accurate and objective picture of what students know and don't know.*
 - These tests assess a limited set of basic skills and concepts. [Foundational frameworks of accessibility and equitable instruction have established that students should be able to demonstrate their learning in various ways](#).
5. *Tests help schools improve (equity) through competition and accountability.*
 - The testing and accountability approach to school reform from the last 20+ years hasn't worked. [Achievement hasn't improved and gaps haven't closed](#). It's past time to move to new strategies such as [performance assessment](#) and [alternative means of accountability](#) that don't rely on standardized tests.
6. *Tests hold our students to high standards.*
 - Standardized tests measure a narrow range of basic skills. Truly high standards would authentically assess [Transferable Skills](#) such as [creative capacity](#) using a [local comprehensive assessments system](#).
7. *The federal government is requiring the tests - there's nothing we can do.*
 - States had a chance to apply for waivers. Other states are making testing optional for districts and using statistical sampling rather than a full test administration. VT AOE didn't fight hard enough or put forth a creative plan. We need to stand up to systemic inequality together.
8. *These tests are not that big of a deal.*
 - The tests have an outsized influence - they [narrow the curriculum](#) to basic skills of math and literacy and cause undue stress to students. They are a powerful

part of the [hidden curriculum](#) that signal the wrong priorities, especially in this moment.

9. *Test results help us target funding to those who need it the most.*
 - We have other ways to disburse funding such as poverty rates (which [correlate strongly with test scores](#) anyway) or the same formulas already in place for Title I funding.
10. *Tests help us see Return on Investment.*
 - Education should not be run like a business, and in any case [standardized tests do not measure educational quality](#). But testing is big business (~\$1.7b in 2012 according to [this infographic](#)) and [test publishers are poised to profit from the “learning loss” narrative](#).

Having conversations with your children about standardized testing

1. **Key messages for all standardized tests** (that also help alleviate [stereotype threat](#))
 - a. Explain that standardized tests are meant to see how well the school is doing, not them.
 - b. The tests measure what students currently know. They don't test innate ability or potential. They also do not measure creativity, collaboration, leadership, hands-on skills, or empathy.
 - c. Talk to them about things that they are good at, that they enjoy, and that they want to get better at.
2. **Explain that there is some controversy over the testing**, especially this year after the pandemic because
 - a. The results won't be useful since many students won't take it (like those who are in virtual schooling)
 - b. Some students are stressed out by standardized testing.
 - c. Many people, including teachers, are hoping that schools will take lessons from the pandemic to become more about relationships, student wellbeing, community building, and meaningful learning.
 - d. Standardized tests only measure a small slice of what students know and can do. They do not let all students show their strengths, and they send the wrong message that things like math, reading, and writing are about much more basic and boring things than they really are.
3. **Give a choice** - explain that in some cases it's okay to break the rules. Show [this two minute video about civil disobedience](#). Explain that they can refuse if:
 - a. They don't want to take the tests this year or
 - b. They want to stand up against what standardized tests represent

Template

[Principal Name]

[School Name]

[Street Address]

[Town/City]

[Date]

Dear Principal xx,

I wanted to let you know that my child, [name], will not take part in the [name the test] this year. We ask that you make arrangements for him/her/them to have a productive educational experience during the testing period.

Thank you for all you do. With each year, our child continues to thrive at [school name]. Much of the credit for his/her/their success, both academically and socially, is due in large part to the excellent work of the teaching and education staff at [school name].[NOTE: you could personalize this more by sharing specific examples of this here] Our decision to opt out is unrelated to anything we've encountered at [school name]. Rather, we feel that there is an overemphasis on standardized testing in today's public schools and we would prefer not to be a part of it this year.

We are grateful to be part of the [school name] community.

Thank you for your assistance on this matter.

Please contact me once you've determined how my child will spend his/her/their time during testing. Having this information in advance will help me prepare my child for school on these days.

Respectfully, [parent/guardian]

cc: [name of student's teacher]

(Adapted from Massachusetts Teachers Association)