

Final rules for K-12 standardized testing released

December 7 2016, by Jennifer C. Kerr



In this Sept. 29, 2016 file photo, Education Secretary John King speaks during the daily briefing at the White House in Washington. Fewer, better, fairer tests. The Obama administration says that's the goal of final rules it's released to help states and schools reduce the standardized tests students must take each year. (AP Photo/Susan Walsh)

Aiming to reduce test-taking in America's classrooms, the Obama administration released final rules Wednesday to help states and school

districts take a new approach to the standardized tests students must take each year.

It's part of the bipartisan education law, signed by President Barack Obama a year ago, that returned substantial control over education policy back to the states, including the role test scores play in evaluating schools, teachers and students.

"Our final regulations strike a balance by offering states flexibility to eliminate redundant testing and promote innovative assessments, while ensuring assessments continue to contribute to a well-rounded picture of how students and schools are doing," said Education Secretary John B. King Jr. "Smarter assessments can make us all smarter."

The idea is to focus more time on classroom learning and less on teaching-to-the test—something critics complained the administration had encouraged with grants and waivers that placed too much of an emphasis on standardized testing.

At a White House gathering of educators, King announced nearly \$8 million in grants to Maryland and Nebraska to develop new ways to measure science achievement that could serve as models for other states.

The education law passed last December still requires schools to test students annually in reading and math in grades three to eight, and once in high school. It gives states greater flexibility in deciding what tests they could use to measure student performance. For example, districts could use a nationally recognized high school assessment, the SAT or ACT, instead of the state tests in high school.

The rules released Wednesday clarify that replacement tests must provide the same benefits to all students, including English learners and students with disabilities. That includes allowing special

accommodations, such as extra time.

Another way to reduce unnecessary testing: Eighth grade students taking advanced math, such as Algebra 1, would take just one test—the Algebra 1 exam and not the regular eighth grade math assessment.

A pilot test that will allow up to seven states to design their own assessments is also part of the new law, and the final regulations set forth a framework for how states can implement those new tests.

The pilot states would eventually administer the tests statewide but could experiment in a smaller number of districts at first. States would have five years to put the new testing system in place but could request a two year extension. The pilot states have not yet been selected. That will fall to the incoming Trump administration.

Farida Mama, a former math teacher, says smaller interim tests can measure progress throughout the year as well as reveal where educators may need to course-correct for students.

"The best leaders are able to frame assessments not as a stick but as one indicator of how are we doing as a place of learning ... and what are our pockets of strength and how do we spread these," Mama, a principal in residence at the UP Education Network, told the White House meeting of educators. The network is a nonprofit school management organization in Massachusetts that works with chronically underperforming schools.

The new regulations do not set a cap on testing in public schools. Students spend about 20 to 25 hours a school year taking standardized tests, according to a study by the Council of the Great City Schools. In all, between pre-K and 12th grade, students take about 112 standardized exams—about 2.3 percent of classroom time for the average 8th grader.

Obama has encouraged states to cap testing at 2 percent of classroom time.

© 2016 The Associated Press. All rights reserved.

Citation: Final rules for K-12 standardized testing released (2016, December 7) retrieved 10 April 2024 from <https://phys.org/news/2016-12-k-standardized.html>

This document is subject to copyright. Apart from any fair dealing for the purpose of private study or research, no part may be reproduced without the written permission. The content is provided for information purposes only.