

Testing Opt-Out Advocates Are White, Well-Educated, and Well-Off, Survey Says

By [Liana Heitin](#) on August 11, 2016 11:31 AM

By guest blogger [Andrew Ujifusa](#)

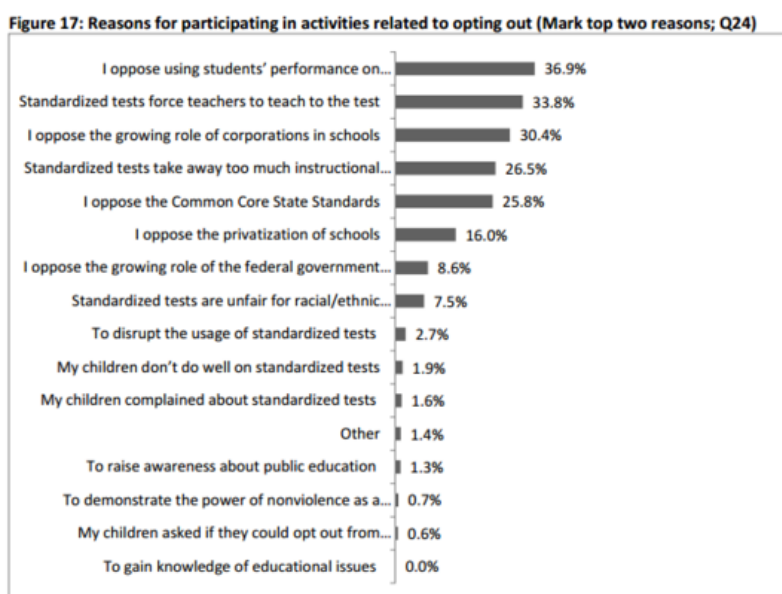
This post originally appeared on the [Politics K-12 blog](#).

A new survey of those involved in **the assessment opt-out movement** finds that typical participants are white, well-educated, and well-off, and very worried about the use of standardized test scores in teacher evaluations.

"Who Opt Out and Why? Results From a National Survey on Opting Out of Standardized Tests" was published earlier this week by Oren Pizmony-Levy, an assistant professor at Teachers College, Columbia University, and Teachers College research associate Nancy Green Saraisky.

Among those surveyed, 82 percent chose opposition to the use of students' performance on tests in teacher evaluations as a top-five reason for getting involved in opt-out. In fact, 37 percent of the respondents marked this as one of their top-two concerns in their opt-out advocacy.

For more of what motivates the opt-out movement, including fears about "teaching to the test," fairness to racial and ethnic minorities, and the view that tests take away instruction time (three items of concern that are in the chart below but not presented in complete form), see the chart below:



"Most of these motivations/reasons reflect a progressive critique of the negative consequences of standardized testing on schools and the role of the private sector in public education," Pizmony-Levy and Saraisky wrote in an analysis of the survey findings.

Demographics Debate

One important note about the methodology here: The survey recruited respondents online, using opt-out groups' social media vehicles, from January through March of this year. So this was not a random-sample survey or poll, but one that specifically targeted those involved in opting out.

The survey sample was 1,641 respondents from 47 states. Roughly a third of all respondents, or 588, came from New York state—a hotbed of opt-out activism, where 2 in 10 students have skipped state tests the last two years—while roughly 10 percent (176) came from Florida.

The demographics of the opt-out movement have been the subject of heated debate between those who say it's largely privileged people without a serious need for school improvement, and those who say the movement is both more diverse and more focused on K-12 solutions than its critics claim.

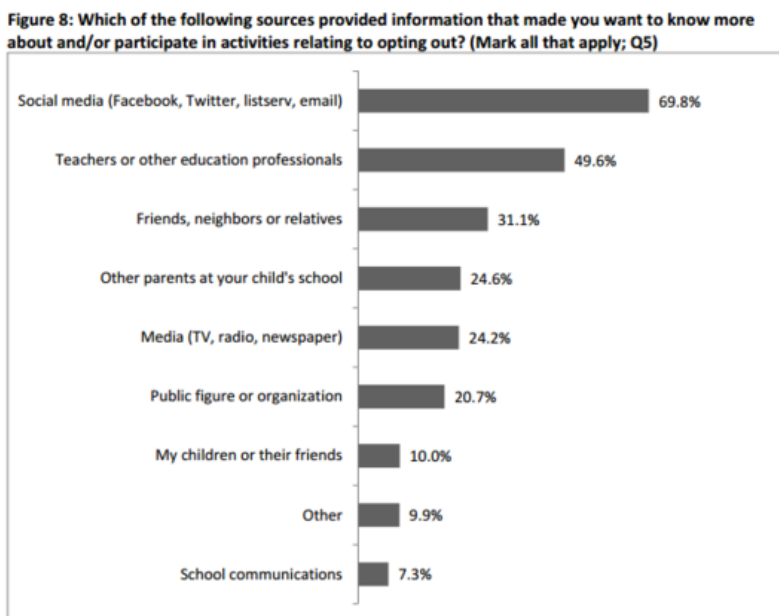
Here is a bit more about those in the opt-out movement who were surveyed:

- 82 percent were parents or guardians of school-age children;
- 92 percent were white;
- 45 percent said they worked in the "education field" in some capacity;

- 60 percent said they had a graduate degree;
- 56 percent reported an annual income of at least \$100,000, while 27 percent said their annual income was more than \$150,000. (In 2014, the U.S. median household income was \$53,657);
- 50 percent identified as liberal, 31 percent said they were "middle of the road" politically, and 18 percent said they were conservative.

Opt-out activists have been **working to diversify their ranks**, but this survey will likely give courage to those who say the opt-out movement is pretty cloistered. Earlier this year, we wrote about **the movement's efforts to expand its reach**. It's still successful in New York, at least, **with 21 percent of students opting out of state exams** for the 2015-16 school year.

There's also a lot in the survey regarding the various platforms opt-out activists have used to learn about and stay involved with the movement. For example, check out the chart below: Social media clearly plays a dominant role in opt-out networks, but teachers' networks apparently play an important role as well:



So how will the Every Student Succeeds Act impact the opt-out movement?

Some advocates are **upset with proposed regulations** from the U.S. Department of Education that lay out several options for states looking to deal with low test-participation rates, or else allow states to submit their own plans to the department. They say that's too restrictive and goes beyond what the language of ESSA allows—and American Federation of Teachers President Randi Weingarten, by the way, also **thinks the draft regulations take the wrong approach**.



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