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Opting Out in Minnesota: Examining the Variables Associated with Opting Out of the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment

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by

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Abstract

Opting out of state mandated testing may have significant implications for schools and states. In Minnesota, each student opted out of the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) receives a score of *not proficient* in school accountability data. The practice of categorizing opt outs as *not proficient* at the school level could skew accountability data and result in the Minnesota Department of Education incorrectly identifying schools needing support and negatively impact funding. The purpose of this quantitative study was to determine if specific school variables (i.e., grade level, academic subject, school type, school enrollment size, proportion of special education students, and socioeconomics) are significantly related to MCA opt out data. Data analyzed were from all Minnesota Traditional Public Schools and Public Charter Schools that reported MCA results in 2018. Publicly available secondary data from the Minnesota Department of Education and the U.S. Department of Agriculture were analyzed using JASP, a statistics analysis program. The results revealed some school variables are significantly associated with MCA opt outs and the odds of schools being non-compliant with the 95% federal testing requirement. Higher opt out rates were found in High Schools, Public Charter Schools, and schools with a higher percentage of students receiving Special Education Services. Lower opt out rates were found in schools with a higher percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced-Priced meals. This study was the first to analyze school variables associated with opt out data in Minnesota yet additional research is needed to: analyze variables not included in this study, explore the reasons cited for opting out, and evaluate the practice of labeling opt outs as *not proficient*. Variables with significant relationships to MCA opt out data must be identified before the opt out dilemma can be fully addressed.

Keywords: opt out, MCA, MDE, state mandated testing,

Dedication

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband, Barry, and our children. Barry, thank you for your unwavering support and sacrifice. Dawson, Riley, Rachel, Bryson, and Abigail, it took me many years to know what I wanted to be when I grew up. Remember, you are never too old to pursue your dreams!

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critically, and remember my audience. I feel blessed to have had the opportunity to work with Dr. Storbeck.

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List of Abbreviations

AYP	Adequate Yearly Progress
CCSO	Council of Chief State Officers
CCSS	Common Core State Standards
ESSA	Every Student Succeeds Act
FCAT	Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test
MBST	Minnesota Basic Skills Test
MCA	Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment
MDE	Minnesota Department of Education
MTAS	Minnesota Test of Academic Skills
NCLB	No Child Left Behind
NGA	National Governors Association
NYSUT	New York State Union of Teachers
RTTT	Race to the Top
RUCC	Rural-Urban Continuum Code
UFT	United Federation of Teachers
USDA	United States Department of Agriculture

Chapter 1: Introduction

Introduction to the Problem

Each spring in Minnesota, a fresh new round of standardized testing is used to measure students' academic growth. Before testing, administrators, teachers, and test proctors are trained to protect the test material's security and assure the state that they will not alter students' responses. Students are prepared in advance for testing by reviewing essential state standards and taking practice computer exams.

With so much precious time and energy invested in preparing and taking these state-mandated assessments, the resulting data must play a vital role at the state level, at a minimum. If standardized assessments' results play an essential role at the school, district, and state level, it would stand to reason that an emphasis should be placed on the test data's accuracy. However, if parents exercise their right to opt students out of taking the standardized assessments, the reported data's accuracy could be questioned. To understand the movement to opt students out of state-mandated testing, it is necessary first to understand the evolution of state-required assessments.

Across the nation, the results of mandated state standardized assessments have served to guide federal and state education policies and measure school and teacher quality. Federal and state education reform's purported goal was to address underserved, at-risk minority populations and low-income students (Croft, Roberts, & Stenhouse, 2016). In 2002, the passage of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act required states to have 95% of students participate in these mandated assessments (Minnesota Department of Education [MDE], 2011). While NCLB helped identify where students were making Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and where they were not making progress, the requirements became burdensome to schools (U.S. Department of

Education, 2019). As a result of the rigorous requirements NCLB placed on schools, President Obama's administration worked to develop an improved, less burdensome law. Out of this work, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a revision of the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was born. ESSA's goal is to improve educational outcomes for all children, especially those from lower-income families, by providing federal funding to school districts serving these students (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). To be eligible to receive funding under ESSA, states must annually document student performance through standardized assessments.

Between the implementation of NCLB and the authorization of ESSA, a national set of English Language Arts and Mathematics curriculum standards called Common Core State Standards (CCSS) were developed and adopted (LaVenia, Cohen-Vogel, & Lang, 2015). The CCSS were embedded in the Race to the Top (RTTT) federal fund competitive grant for which states could apply (LaVenia et al., 2015). However, to be eligible to receive the RTTT funds, states were required to adopt the federal K-12 standards, which some administrators, teachers, and parents perceived as "federal coercion" (LaVenia et al., 2015, p. 149). The combination of the Common Core and mandated statewide assessments under ESSA resulted in an increased public outcry against required state testing.

In 2015, at about the same time ESSA was signed into law by President Obama, parents across the nation formed grassroots opt out groups to voice their concerns about standardized testing requirements (Mitra, Mann, & Hlavacik, 2016). Parents objected to the adoption of Common Core and the emphasis placed on mandatory standardized assessment. Large scores of parents opted out of standardized testing for their children; for instance, 20% of parents of public school students in New York state chose to opt their students out of state testing in 2015 and

2016 (Kerstetter, 2016). In Colorado, between the years 2011 and 2014, no district fell below the required 95% participation in state testing yet, in 2015, some school districts reported participation rates as low as 60% (Clayton, Bingham, & Ecks, 2019). Grade 9 participation in the Colorado state assessment dropped from 98% in 2014 to 75% in 2015 (Clayton et al., 2019). Researchers evaluated the opt out trend in Colorado and found that most students who opted out of testing were White, attending higher-performing schools, with fewer students receiving free and reduced-price lunch benefits (Clayton et al., 2019).

According to Ryan (2016), the opt out movement is mostly comprised of White, middle-class, suburban parents. Students who were anticipated to do well on the assessments were being opted out by parents (Clayton et al., 2019). However, in New York, students who opted out were from wealthier districts and more likely to be lower-achieving students (Marland, Harrick, & Sireci, 2020). In low-income communities, there is fear that opting out of mandated state assessments may jeopardize access to educational opportunities or result in school closure (Ryan, 2016). Ryan (2016) argued that in the event of school closures, affluent parents have other options for their students, such as sending them to private schools.

In Minnesota, students who opt out of the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCAs) are recorded as *not proficient* at the school and district level. Standardized assessment data are used to measure teacher and school quality in some districts and states. If high-performing students are opting out of testing, district test scores would, in theory, drop; therefore, skewing accountability data and resulting in districts not meeting required benchmarks. Regardless of who is opting out, the results are the same, skewed data are being used to measure teacher and school quality.

Statement of the Problem

NCLB required states to test at least 95% of their students. States are required to annually report the results of standardized tests to be eligible to receive federal funding under ESSA. The accountability data from statewide tests are reported to the U.S. Department of Education and are used to evaluate student achievement. State-mandated assessments are the instruments used to hold teachers and schools accountable for student achievement and are a direct result of federal education reform targeting educational inequities (Clayton et al., 2019; Croft et al., 2016; Jakee & Keller, 2017). Reporting skewed data may directly affect federal funding and result in financial penalties to schools and districts that do not meet their yearly benchmarks (Jakee & Keller, 2017).

Test data are also used at the state level to measure student growth and school progress toward closing the achievement gap (MDE, 2020a). In some cases, assessment data are used to measure teacher effectiveness in the classroom and are part of teacher evaluations (Croft et al., 2016; Hanushek, 2019). The pressure to improve test scores is passed down from politicians to schools, teachers, and students (Croft et al., 2016). For schools that fail to demonstrate AYP from year-to-year, the stakes are high and may result in the loss of federal funding, or ultimately result in school closures and the loss of jobs (Au & Hollar, 2016; Neill, 2016). The threat of failure and resulting sanctions have led some teachers and students to cheat on state assessments (Jakee & Keller, 2017). Cheating on these high-stakes tests yields flawed data, yet this is not the only cause of inaccurate data. Parents' decisions to opt their students out of state-mandated assessments also results in erroneous accountability data.

While the opt out movement has been framed as a grassroots parent movement, teachers were also involved in the action. The opt out movement caused a division among the members

of New York City's United Federation of Teachers (UFT), with each side passionate about their cause (Antush, 2016). In 2014, UFT President Michael Mulgrew's caucus emerged as strong supporters of standardized testing, including use of the scores for teacher evaluations (Antush, 2016). Mulgrew vehemently refused to support the opt out movement (Antush, 2016). However, other union caucuses and groups were equally strong in their opposition to standardized testing (Antush, 2016). The movement to opt out of state testing grew in intensity in the spring of 2015 when more than 620,000 students nationwide refused to take state assessments (Neill, 2016). Opting out of state assessments has significant implications for the accuracy of accountability data used to measure students' academic achievement and evaluate teachers (Marland et al., 2020).

As part of the accountability system under ESSA, Minnesota uses an academic achievement rate that is based on students meeting or exceeding standards on the Math and Reading MCAs. Per the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) requirements, for every student who is opted out of the MCA, the school and district receive a *not proficient* score. MCA data are one way to measure how schools, districts, and Minnesota perform in the education arena. Significant testing opt out rates among specific groups of students may result in skewed accountability data. The use of flawed data could contribute to MDE incorrectly identifying a school or district as needing either targeted or comprehensive support. Once identified by MDE as needing support, schools must meet specific requirements before being removed from that list. For schools that receive Title I monies, failure to meet the established exit criteria to be removed from the support list may receive additional interventions by MDE (MDE, 2018c). Interventions by MDE may include significant staffing or leadership changes, conversion to a magnet or charter school, or school closure (MDE, 2018c).

Statement of Purpose

The purpose of this quantitative study was to analyze specific variables (i.e., grade level, academic subject, school type, school enrollment size, and socioeconomics) associated with opting out of the Minnesota state-mandated assessment, the MCAs. Understanding which variables are associated with MCA opt out rates will guide future research; may potentially lead to policy changes in educational assessment; and may serve as the platform to create initiatives to educate parents, teachers, and administrators about the importance of standardized testing.

Research Questions

This study was designed to answer the following questions:

Research Question 1. Is there a significant relationship between school variables (i.e., grade level, academic subject, school type, school enrollment size, proportion of special education students, and socioeconomics) and the percentage of students who are opted out of MCA testing?

Ho1. There are no significant relationships between school variables and the percentage of students who are opted out of the MCA tests.

Ha1. There are significant relationships between school variables and the percentage of students who are opted out of the MCA tests.

Research Question 2. Is there a significant relationship between school variables (i.e., grade level, academic subject, school type, school enrollment size, proportion of special education students, and socioeconomics) and the odds of schools meeting compliance with an opt out rate of less than 5%?

Ho2. There are no significant relationships between school variables and the odds of schools meeting compliance with an opt out rate of less than 5%.

Ha2. There are significant relationships between school variables and the odds of schools meeting compliance with an opt out rate of less than 5%.

Significance of the Study

Many researchers have studied the movement to opt out of state-mandated testing. Some researchers have studied the opt out movement as part of educational reform (Au & Hollar, 2016; Neill, 2016; Ryan, 2016; Wilson, Hastings, & Moses, 2016). Others have examined the impact of test refusals on measurements of teacher quality (Marland et al., 2020). The opt out movement has been researched from the perspectives of both teachers and parents (Antush, 2016; Levy, 2016). The opt out issue has been studied in several states such as Colorado, Florida, and New York (Clayton et al., 2019; Schroeder, Currin, & McCardle, 2020; Wang, 2017). However, aside from newspaper articles informing readers about state test refusals, no research specific to Minnesota was found. There is a lack of research that specifically examines the correlation between the opt out data and the variables of grade level tested, subject tested, school type, school enrollment size, and socioeconomics.

Minnesota is not exempt from the opt out movement. Although the opt out data in Minnesota may not be as startling as that of New York and Colorado, it is still a concern, with 14 Minneapolis schools reporting opt out rates greater than 5% (Golden & Webster, 2019). In Minnesota, parents have the right to opt their students out of the state exam with no significant consequences. However, as noted on the test refusal form parents are required to complete for every student that opts out of testing, the school receives a score of *not proficient* (MDE, 2020a). So, while Minnesota parents and students may not be penalized for opting out, the non-participation of these students skews the schools' and districts' accountability data. At the school level, a student who receives a *not proficient* score on an MCA may be incorrectly

identified as needing supplemental supports, or, in some cases may be denied access to more academically rigorous courses.

In the education world, assessment is a necessary and generally accepted process that is used to measure the effectiveness of instruction (Wiliam, 2010). However, when applied to state-mandated testing, assessment becomes a controversial issue. Parents, teachers, administrators, and policymakers are lined up on both sides of the testing issue, firm in their beliefs with no consensus about the "correct" position to take. Regardless of personal sentiment, state-mandated assessments remain an unavoidable reality. As long as these standardized tests exist and as long as ESSA allows, some parents will choose to opt their students out of testing. This study is significant because it specifically examined the opt out decisions in Minnesota. The current Minnesota policy categorizing students who opt out as not proficient and subsequently skewing school accountability data needs to be reviewed so the data accurately represents school and district performance. Furthermore, this study could be significant in potentially leading to fewer opt outs if we can better understand the variables in opt out trends. The opt out issue is complex and requires time to be resolved, yet the end goal of accurate accountability data makes this a worthy pursuit.

Definition of Terms

Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS is set of uniform standards in English Language Arts and Mathematics drafted in 2009 by the National Governors' Association and the Council of State School Officers. The Obama administration promoted the CCSS as necessary for educational equity (Deas, 2018).

Elementary School. Grade levels that comprise elementary school can vary between schools. For the purpose of this study, and consistent with the MDE, elementary, includes any school serving students up through Grade 5 or 6.

Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Signed into law in 2015, ESSA replaced the ESEA and NCLB. ESSA retained the testing requirements of NCLB but gave states more control over accountability (U.S. Department of Education, 2019).

High school. MDE has defined high school as a school that is capable of having graduation rates. For the purpose of this study high school is defined as serving Grades 9-12.

High-stakes. In this study, high-stakes refers to state-mandated assessments that are administered yearly for accountability purposes.

Middle school. MDE has defined middle school as any non-high school serving students above Grade 6. For this study, middle school is defined as Grades 6, 7 and 8.

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA). The MCAs are standardized tests administered yearly to students in public and public charter schools. The Reading MCA is given to students in Grades 3-8 and Grade 10. The Math MCA is given in Grades 3-8 and Grade 11. The Science MCA is administered in Grades 5 and 8 and once in high school (MDE, 2018b).

Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). MDE is the organization responsible for the oversight of school organizations in Minnesota.

No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Signed into law in 2002, NCLB was federal education reform that replaced the ESEA. NCLB increased accountability in the form of standardized tests for students beginning in Grade 3 and required 95% participation in these assessments. NCLB also required all students in all subgroups to be 100% proficient by 2014 (U.S. Department of Education, 2004).

Opt out. The term opt out has been used in this study to define those who choose not to take state-mandated assessments. Other terms such as refusal or boycott may have been used in the reviewed literature.

Race to the Top (RTTT). Launched in 2009, RTTT was a competitive grant initiative that states were able to apply for. Participation in RTTT was voluntary and states were required to outline steps taken toward meeting specific U.S. Department of Education requirements. Priority for the RTTT grant was given to states that adopted the CCSS (Mathis, 2010).

Socioeconomics. For the purpose of this study, socioeconomics included the following:

- Percentage poverty level. The percentage of people in each county who were considered in poverty in 2018. Poverty level is defined in relation to the size of the family unit. In 2018, poverty level for a family unit of four people including two children was $25,465 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2018).
- Percentage unemployed. The percentage of people in each county who were unemployed in 2018.
- Median household income. The 2018 average household income at the county level.
- Percentage college completion. The percentage of adults 25 years and older who completed four or more years of college.
- Rural-Urban Continuum Code (RUCC). RUCC is used to distinguish between metropolitan counties by the population of their metro area, and between rural counties based on proximity to metropolitan counties and the degree of urbanization. Effective February 2013, and updated every 10 years, the RUCC

defined by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), Office of Management and Budget are as follows in Table 1:

Table 1

2013 Rural-Urban Continuum Codes

Code	Description
1	Counties in metro areas of 1 million population or more
2	Counties in metro areas of 250,000 to 1 million population
3	Counties in metro areas of fewer than 250,000 population
4	Urban population of 20,000 or more, adjacent to a metro area
5	Urban population of 20,000 or more not adjacent to a metro area
6	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999 adjacent to a metro area
7	Urban population of 2,500 to 19,999 not adjacent to a metro area
8	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, adjacent to metro area
9	Completely rural or less than 2,500 urban population, not adjacent to metro area

Value-added measures. Value-added measures is the degree to which a teacher influences change in student performance over time. In this study, value-added is linked to teacher evaluations under the RTTT initiative and NCLB waivers.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter 2 reviews literature related to education reform and state-mandated educational assessments. Chapter 3 outlines the methodology used including data collection and analysis and discusses the theoretical framework for this study. The results of this study are discussed in Chapter 4. Chapter 5 includes a discussion on, and implications of, the results. References and appendices are included at the end of this dissertation.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Opting out of state-mandated assessments is a complex topic. Understanding the opt out movement requires an understanding of the origins of state-mandated tests and the intended goal of collecting assessment data. Furthermore, it is important to understand the assessment data that are collected and how that data are used. There are many questions that need to be answered before delving deeply into the opt out movement and the purpose of this study.

History of Standardized Testing

Standardized testing is not new, and neither are the controversies surrounding these assessments. The use of standardized assessments can be traced back to seventh century Imperial China when government job applicants were required to take a standardized test, the Chinese Civil Service Exam (ProCon, 2018). In the early part of the twentieth century, the United States used standardized assessments in schools to sort students into different educational tracks, ultimately setting different standards for the select few who would be college material and those destined for factory work (Linn, 2001). The use of assessments to sort students into different educational paths was, at that time, considered both objective and efficient (Linn, 2001).

In contrast, Cunningham (2019) argued that since the implementation of standardized testing, during the Progressive Era, from the 1890s to the 1920s, the tests have been used to "racialize school success by penalizing populations that deviate from whiteness" (p. 112). While the definition of "whiteness" has expanded since the Progressive Era to include European immigrants, non-Whites continued to be marginalized by standardized testing (Cunningham, 2019). During the civil rights era, there was concern about the amount of money allocated for Title I equity programs only resulting in marginal differences (Cunningham, 2019). Schools that

performed well on assessments were rewarded with additional funding while poorly performing schools were penalized with decreased funding (Cunningham, 2019; Jakee & Keller, 2017). Test based accountability may be controversial, yet research has documented the correlation between economic outcomes and school improvement underscoring the value of assessment data (Hanushek, 2019). Furthermore, analysis of assessment data is important in guiding school improvement efforts and identifying student centered remediation strategies (Beaver & Weinbaum, 2015).

Table 2

Key Dates in Educational Reform History

Date	Event
1965	Elementary and Secondary Education Act
2002	No Child Left Behind Act
2007-2009	Great Recession
2009	Race to the Top competitive grant
2009	Common Core State Standards
2010	No Child Left Behind waivers
2015	Every Student Succeeds Act
2015	Rise of the opt out movement

A brief history of education reform. Across the nation, the results of mandated state standardized assessments have been used to guide state and federal education policies and measure school quality. In 2002, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act introduced a new era of "high-stakes" testing to hold schools accountable for student performance. NCLB expected that by 2014, all students, regardless of their subgroup, would test at 100% proficiency (Au & Hollar, 2016; Neill, 2016; Wiliam, 2010). NCLB's logic was that differences in student outcomes on tests should be attributed to the quality of education (Wiliam, 2010). Schools that did not improve faced severe sanctions, such as loss of funding, staff reassignment, or school closure

(Neill, 2016). NCLB was due for reauthorization in 2007, but because of a divided Congress, the federal government was unable to agree (Au & Hollar 2016; Neill, 2016).

In 2009, while the reauthorization of NCLB was still being debated, the Obama administration launched the Race to the Top (RTTT) competitive grant. Participation in the competition was voluntary and required states to submit an application that described past achievements and steps toward meeting policies outlined by the U.S. Department of Education (Au & Hollar, 2016; Howell & Magazinnik, 2020). The grant was enticing for schools as it came at a time when states were facing budget challenges from the 2007-2009 Great Recession (Au & Hollar, 2016; Howell & Magazinnik, 2020). NCLB was still in effect during the RTTT initiative. In 2010, about the same time as RTTT, President Obama announced a controversial plan to grant states waivers from the onerous requirements of NCLB. To be eligible for the waiver, states were required to adopt specific reforms that were spelled out in "A Blueprint for Reform: The Reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act" (Derthick & Rotherham, 2012). Along with the required reforms under the waiver, the RTTT initiative endorsed policies tying teacher evaluations to students' standardized test scores and strongly encouraging schools to adopt the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (Au & Hollar, 2016). The waivers and RTTT required teacher evaluation to be based on local and state test scores resulting in a significant increase in student testing (Hutt & Schneider, 2018; Neill, 2016). Bennett (2016) noted that a large portion of the time students spend testing is a result of district-level requirements versus federal mandates. Furthermore, states that adopted the CCSS were given priority in the RTTT competition (Mathis, 2010). While adoption of the CCSS were not required, states were desperate for funding so they had little choice (Au & Hollar, 2016).

The origins of CCSS have been linked to a 2009 meeting of the National Governors' Association and the Council of State School Officers where a uniform set of U.S. Education Standards were proposed (Mathis, 2010). The Obama administration promoted the standards as being needed to achieve educational equality for all students as well as for the U.S. to be competitive in the global economy (Deas, 2018; Loeb & Byun, 2019; Mathis, 2010). Proponents of the common standards believed that it was a move toward educational equity with a common curriculum that would allow students to move between districts and states with no disruption in their learning (Deas, 2018; Mathis, 2010). Those opposed to CCSS argued that a common set of standards would result in a narrowed curriculum and an emphasis on teaching only to the standards, thereby losing an enriched classroom experience (Deas, 2018; Mathis, 2010).

To incentivize school scores, NCLB and subsequent educational reforms attempted to improve educational outcomes for all students by attaching funding to standardized test performance so that well-performing schools received additional funding while poorly performing schools were penalized with reduced funding (Jakee & Keller, 2017). Under NCLB, schools that received Title I monies were required to achieve Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) to receive funding for subsequent years (Cunningham, 2019). However, to demonstrate AYP, 95% of students were not only required to take the standardized assessment, but they also needed to show improvement over scores from previous years (Cunningham, 2019; Mitra et al., 2016). A school is identified for school improvement after failing to meet AYP for two consecutive school years. The school moves to the next year as shown in Table 3 if it continues to not make AYP.

Table 3

Adequate Yearly Progress Improvement for Title I Schools

Year	Improvement
1	Parents allowed to transfer students to a school that is not "in need of improvement"
2	Supplemental services (i.e., tutoring) are provided for students from low-income families.
3	Corrective action (i.e., extended school day, new curriculum, staff replacement).
4	Restructuring plan is developed (i.e., replacing staff, closing and reopening as a charter school, state takeover).
5	Implementation of the restructuring plan developed in year 4.

(U.S. Department of Education, 2002, n. p.)

Transition from NCLB to ESSA. While NCLB helped identify where students were making progress and where they were not, NCLB's requirements became burdensome to schools (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). As a result, President Obama's administration worked to develop an improved law. Out of that work, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), a revision of the 50-year-old Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA), was born. ESSA became law in 2015 but did not take effect until 2018 (Hanushek, 2019). ESSA's goal was to improve educational outcomes for all children, especially those from lower-income families, by providing federal funding to school districts serving these students (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). To be eligible to receive this specific funding under ESSA, states were required to annually document student performance through standardized assessments. While ESSA retained the testing requirements of NCLB, ESSA no longer required states to reassign staff and close or privatize low-performing schools, rather it gave states the power to decide how to intervene (Au & Hollar, 2016; Neill, 2016). In addition, ESSA allowed states to develop and implement their own opt out policies and prohibited the federal government from penalizing states based on the number of students who opted out of testing (Mitra et al., 2016). In response, two states adopted

opt out policies that clearly outlined the procedures for parents, two states developed unclear, informal policies, and 45 states adopted ambiguous policies (Mitra et al., 2016). One state, New Jersey, adopted a policy with consequences against opting out (Mitra et al., 2016). Of the 45 states with ambiguous policies, 12 states allowed opting out for religious or health reasons only, one state allowed opting out but students lost the opportunity for state scholarships, and 13 states allowed opting out but directly tied test results to student promotions (Mitra et al., 2016). In 2015, at about the same time ESSA was signed into law by President Obama, a group of parents in New York State public schools formed the movement called "Opt Out" (Pizmony-Levy & Cosman, 2017).

Reasons for State-Mandated Assessments

Why standardized test data are needed. Over the years, the goal of standardized assessments has shifted from differentiating instruction for select groups of students to promoting high academic standards for all students and closing the achievement gap (Linn, 2001; Smith, 2014). While the Federal Government has no jurisdiction over education at the state-level, they can withhold funding if a state does not follow the requirements set forth in NCLB and ESSA. The adoption of state-mandated assessments was in response to federal legislation requiring accountability data and resulted in the focus shifting from students to schools, specifically to teachers and administrators (Smith, 2014). State-mandated standardized testing data plays an important role in school accountability. Schools are answerable to students, parents, employers, and taxpayers (Wiliam, 2010).

From a global perspective the results of mandated academic assessments have been used to make comparisons between educational systems across the world. Some researchers have argued that academic achievement tests not only provide the basis for school improvement, they

also play an important role in the economy at the state and national levels (Hanushek, 2019; Loeb & Byun, 2019). According to Jakee and Keller (2017) taxpayers bear the burden when students fail the Florida Comprehensive Assessment Test (FCAT) and are subsequently retained. The authors estimated that in 2012, 36,577 Grade 3 students were retained because they failed the Reading FCAT, which resulted in a cost of over $363 million to taxpayers (Jakee & Keller, 2017). Research has demonstrated a relationship between standardized test scores and economic outcomes and revealed that lower life-time earnings are closely correlated with the failure to earn a diploma (Hanushek, 2019; Neill, 2016). Lower earnings equate to less tax revenue at the state and federal level. Jakee and Keller (2017) estimated that the 18,985 students in Florida who did not earn their diploma in 2011 resulted in a loss of approximately $2 billion in federal taxes and Social Security contributions. As Wiliam (2010) stated, "when education fails, the social and financial costs are borne by the whole of society" (p. 108).

Standardized test data has also played a role in the school choice movement. Realtors use school test data to promote real estate to parents, and parents use the data to shop for the best school for their children (Loeb & Byun, 2019; Smith, 2014). Using test scores in this way has forced public schools to compete for students against private schools, charter schools, and other public schools (Loeb & Byun, 2019; Smith, 2014). While competition for students is a problem, Bennett (2016) argued that test data are needed to measure achievement of state standards and to direct resources to low-socioeconomic status and underperforming schools. States would not know where to focus their improvement efforts without state-mandated test data.

How standardized test data are used. While individual student data are collected, an emphasis is now placed on system-level data and measurements of achievement toward state-identified academic standards. Researchers have argued that the focus of test-based

accountability has shifted from schools and districts to individual teachers as the data was directly linked to teacher performance (Hanushek, 2019; Loeb & Byun, 2019). State-mandated assessments have become high-stakes for teachers, not for students (Wiliam, 2010). Bennett (2016) noted that fewer opt outs were found in states that did not make test results a large part of teacher evaluations, which could indicate that the movement to opt out is more about how the data are used rather than the tests themselves.

In Minnesota, standardized test data are necessary to measure and hold schools accountable for student learning (MDE, 2018c). Annually, Minnesota reports the aggregated Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) test scores to the public and to the U.S. Department of Education to report how students in the state are performing in school. The state uses the MCA data to evaluate the progress schools are making toward closing the achievement gap among student groups. At the local level, schools use MCA results to look for patterns of strengths and weaknesses in performance, which may lead to adjustments in curriculum and instruction. Parents may also use the MCA data to guide school-choice (MDE, 2018c).

Minnesota assessments and the adoption of common core subject standards. To build more rigorous standards and testing, Minnesota adopted the Basic Skills Test (MBST) and the Profile of Learning standards in the early 1990s. Students in Minnesota were required to pass the MBST in both Math and Reading and meet a minimum number of Profile of Learning standards before they could graduate (MDE, 2020b). The MCA eventually replaced the MBST. Beginning with the graduating class of 2010, the state required students to pass the MCA to graduate (MDE, 2020b).

The Profile of Learning standards, repealed in 2003, was replaced with the Minnesota Academic Standards (MDE, 2020b). State standards in Mathematics, English Language Arts,

and the Arts were adopted into law in 2003, with standards in Science and Social Studies adopted in 2004. Nationally, in 2009, CCSS were developed in an effort to establish a consistent set of national education standards and became a part of the competition for federal funds under the RTTT initiative (LaVenia et al., 2015). States were encouraged to adopt the CCSSs to be eligible for the additional federal funds under RTTT. In 2010, Minnesota elected to only adopt the Common Core English Language Arts standards (MDE, n.d.). Minnesota did not adopt the Mathematics standards because they had been revised in 2007 and were scheduled to be reviewed again in 2015-2016, among other reasons (MDE, n.d.). During a spring 2016 special legislative session, the Mathematics standards review was postponed until the 2021-2022 school year (MDE, n.d.).

The Importance and Significance of the Opt out Movement

Like the existence of standardized testing, opting out of testing was also not new. Neill (2016) reported that in the late 1990s Massachusetts' implementation of a mandated graduation test was met with opposition that nearly derailed the required exam. According to Neill (2016) the testing refusals in Massachusetts "…marked the first mass opposition to standardized testing" (p. 16). Under NCLB, the role of parents, teachers, and administrators in shaping educational policy, was significantly decreased (Mitra et al., 2016). With the implementation of the CCSS, opting out became an organized grassroots movement (Wang, 2017). ESSA attempted to restore parents' voices by allowing them to opt out of state-mandated assessments (Mitra et al., 2016). The opt out movement gained the support of teachers and teachers unions as well as parents. In 2014, the Chicago Teachers Union engaged in the opt out movement and actively focused its opt out efforts on two mostly Latino schools resulting in significant opt outs (Neill, 2016). In March

2015, the president of the New York State Union of Teachers (NYSUT) stated she would urge parents to opt out of testing (Antush, 2016).

Opt out and the corporatization of education. In simple terms, the opt out movement could be defined as a refusal to take state-mandated educational assessments. However, the opt out movement is complex and has been defined in several different ways. Some researchers have defined the opt out movement as a response to neoliberal education reforms and a resistance to the corporatization of education (Au & Hollar, 2016; Schroeder, Currin, & McCardle, 2016). Education reform created opportunities for corporations to step in and capitalize on the education market. The CCSS were developed and copyrighted by the Council of Chief State Officers (CCSO) and the National Governors Association (NGA) without significant teacher involvement (Foster, 2016; Mathis, 2010). The NGA tasked Achieve, a corporation founded by the NGA, with drafting the common standards (Deas, 2018; Mathis, 2010). To draft the standards, Achieve excluded subject-matter experts and formed workgroups staffed by representatives of testing companies and pro-accountability groups, several of whom had direct ties to Pearson, an educational assessment and publishing company (Au & Hollar, 2016; Deas, 2018; Mathis, 2010; Neill, 2016). The CCSS were funded primarily by the Gates Foundation (Au & Hollar, 2016; Deas, 2018; Mathis, 2010). As additional evidence of the corporatization of education, Pearson is paid to make, administer, and grade the assessments used by states (Au & Hollar, 2016). To capitalize further, Pearson also creates and markets materials for test preparation, reportedly selling millions of dollars of their products (Au & Hollar, 2016; Crowder & Konle, 2015).

Opt out and social justice and equity. The opt out movement has also been described as a fight for social justice and equity (Wilson et al., 2017). Despite the seemingly good

intentions of education reform, some have argued that the reforms racialized test performance and widened the inequities by negatively impacting students of color, narrowing curriculum content, and encouraging the exclusion of low-performing students by keeping them out of school in an effort to boost test scores (Au, 2016; Croft et al., 2016; Cunningham, 2019; Schniedewind & Tanis, 2017; Wilson et al., 2016)). Researchers reported that the achievement gap between White-Black and White-Latino students narrowed significantly from the 1970s to the early 1980s (Foster, 2016). Yet, progress toward closing the achievement gap slowed remarkably in the years after NCLB was launched and the income-achievement gap was found to be 40% higher (Foster, 2016). Hagopian (2016) claimed that schools that serve low-income students and students of color are subjected to rounds of test preparation and test taking, sacrificing classes that encourage creativity and critical thinking. Researchers argued that NCLB did not acknowledge the effects of societal inequities on the economic and racial achievement gaps and placed the responsibilities of closing these gaps on the shoulders of teachers (Au & Hollar, 2016).

Opt out and test anxiety. Opting out of high-stakes testing has been cited as a way to protect children from test anxiety and serve as a cry for less test preparation and more learning (Wilson et al., 2017). Researchers found that elementary students reported significantly more physiological and cognitive symptoms of anxiety related to high-stakes assessments as opposed to classroom assessments and led some to declare the tests as harmful to students and fear long-term effects (Neill, 2016; Schroeder et al., 2020; Segool, Carlson, Goforth, Von Der Embse, & Barterian, 2013;). Teachers and parents of some New York elementary students reported that high student anxiety manifested in overt physical illness during the 2013 state test (Neill, 2016). Students are not the only ones who experience anxiety in response to high-stakes tests. High-

stakes testing has also been shown to increase stress and anxiety levels in teachers, regardless of subject or grade level taught (Gonzalez, Peters, Orange, & Grigsby, 2017; Saeki, Segool, Pendergast, & Embse, 2018; Segool et al., 2013). Gonzalez et al. (2017) reported that higher levels of job-related stress were found in high-school teachers who taught high-stakes subjects.

Opt out and time spent testing. Supporters of the opt out movement cited concerns about the length of tests, the number of tests students were required to sit through, and the amount of classroom time lost to tests (Bennett, 2016; Levy, 2016; Stotsky, 2016). Nationwide research discovered that students in large urban districts took an average of 112 assessments throughout their K-12 years (Levy, 2016). A survey of the 66 largest urban school districts found that students took an average of eight standardized tests each year and an average of 1.9-2.3% of instructional time was spent on mandated testing; this estimate does not include time spent on classroom or district benchmark assessments or the amount of time devoted to test preparation (Bennett, 2016; Levy, 2016). Levy (2016) reported that students spent up to 540 minutes completing standardized tests in April/May in some New York State elementary schools, which is longer than the SAT college entrance exam. Another survey of 14 large school districts discovered that students in urban schools, depending on grade-levels, spent anywhere from 80% to 266% more time on standardized tests than students in suburban schools (Foster, 2016).

A 2017 Minnesota Standardized Student Testing report revealed that students, on average spent 1.2 hours taking one MCA, 3.1 hours taking two MCAs, and 4.5 hours taking three MCAs (State of Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor Program Evaluation Division, 2017, p. 50). Students in Grade 5 and 8 are required to take three MCAs, one in each subject area, Mathematics, Reading, and Science. The amount of time to test all students in a school can

range from five days to several weeks (State of Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor Program Evaluation Division, 2017). The report found that in 2016 more than half of the schools in Minnesota took more than 15 days to test all of their students and over 300 schools took 25 school days to complete MCA testing (State of Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor Program Evaluation Division, 2017, p. 54). Depending on school size, space availability, and the number of tested students, schools may find it necessary to spread testing out across several days, disrupting normal school operations.

Opt out and teacher evaluations. Opt out activists also objected to using students' standardized test scores as measurements of teacher quality. A component of the RTTT grant and an NCLB waiver exempting states from required 100% student proficiency by 2014, was that states must use students' test scores in teacher evaluation systems, also known as value-added measures (Loeb & Byun, 2019; Marland et al., 2020; Neill, 2010). Some researchers cited concerns about the validity, reliability, and the potential for bias in value-added ratings of teachers (Loeb & Byun, 2019; Marland et al., 2020). Student performance on assessments can vary depending on the standardized assessment given and teacher performance can vary from year to year (Loeb & Byun, 2019). The potential for bias in value-added systems exists if a large number of a particular subgroup opts out of testing. For example, if all high-achieving students in one classroom opt out the value-added measures could be biased against that teacher and other teachers (Marland et al., 2020). In 2014, in a school that enrolled students from over 30 different countries, 30 teachers refused to administer an assessment whose sole purpose was to evaluate teachers (Antush, 2016). Fifty percentage of students in the same school were opted out of the test by their parents (Antush, 2016).

Opt out and curriculum. Linked to value-added teacher evaluations, opt out activists expressed concern about narrowed curriculum. Teachers reportedly spend more time preparing students for high-stakes tests, especially in low-performing schools (Croft et al., 2016; Milner, 2014). Parents and teachers believed that the quality of teaching decreased as teachers lost creativity because they were afraid to deviate from test aligned scripted lesson plans (Levy, 2016; Welsh, Graham, & Williams, 2019). Teaching to the test may raise test scores, yet one could question test validity for truly assessing student knowledge (Amrein & Berliner, 2002). Test scores may improve, but can students demonstrate a deeper understanding and transfer their knowledge? Some schools doubled instruction time in Math and English Language Arts and sacrificed other subjects in a focused effort to improve student test scores (Levy, 2016). Yet, these other subjects such as Social Studies, Science, and Art, help build background knowledge that is needed to comprehend text (Jakee & Keller, 2017). Gonzalez et al. (2017) revealed that curriculum narrowed in high-stakes subjects too as teachers focused instructional time on tested content.

Yeh (2005) addressed the "narrowed curriculum" concern in a study of teacher and administrator responses to MBST and found that while curriculum was narrowed it was supported by teachers and administrators. At the time of Yeh's (2005) study, students in Minnesota were required to pass the MBST to graduate. Teachers who taught non-tested subjects took the opportunity to incorporate Reading and Math into their content areas (Yeh, 2005). In 2015-2016, 40% of teachers in grade-levels tested reported spending over five hours on test preparation activities (State of Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor Program Evaluation Division, 2017, p. 48).

The significance of opting out. Federal education reform pushed for uniform academic standards as a way to close the racial achievement gap present in U.S. schools (Smith, 2014). The implementation of "market-based accountability" in the form of standardized assessments was one method of achieving the goal of uniformity (Smith, 2014, n. p.). Research has documented a relationship between education and economic outcomes and has reinforced the importance of test-based accountability (Hanushek, 2019; Jakee & Keller, 2017; Wiliam, 2010). Research has also demonstrated the importance of standardized test data in measuring school performance and in identifying areas in need of improvement (Beaver & Weinbaum, 2015; Loeb & Byun, 2019; Wiliam, 2010). Bennett (2016) stated that standardized test data are the only way to compare performance between schools and demographic groups yet opt outs distort the data's usefulness. Opting out of state-mandated assessments results in incomplete data that is used to hold teachers and schools accountable to their stakeholders. Neill (2016) argued that opting out undermines the use of test data to address educational equity and accountability. Au (2016) stated, "opting out renders the test-data meaningless and subsequently throws the entire logics and function of the system into question" (p. 55). Schools analyze standardized test data to determine specific academic areas to target for improvement (Beaver & Weinbaum, 2015). It could be hypothesized that because of testing opt outs the state would be using *meaningless* and *distorted* data to make decisions for targeted improvement; the result could be costly should schools expend time, energy, and resources toward an incorrectly identified academic weakness.

Opting out of state assessments results in missing data which may also affect teacher evaluations and school performance, negatively or positively. If a large enough number of high-performing students in a classroom or school opt out of an assessment, the results could label the teacher or school as needing improvement (Beaver, Westmaas, & Sludden, 2014). The number

of opt outs that it would take to tip the accountability scale from proficient to needing improvement is difficult to identify as it depends on other factors such as how proficient the teacher or school were to start with (Beaver et al., 2014).

With an emphasis placed on the importance of standardized test data in school accountability, opting out of assessments deprives the accountability system of that information. It could be argued that depriving the system of the data causes faulty or inaccurate assumptions to be made about the proficiency of teachers and schools.

Who Opts Out?

Nationwide demographics. While New York State has been called the *epicenter* of the opt out movement, the organized movement was not restricted to New York (Wang, 2017). The opt out movement was also happening in other states such as Colorado, Pennsylvania, Oregon, and Florida. Regardless of where the opt out movement was taking place, activists united in their goal to "starve the system of data" (Schroeder et al., 2016, n.p).

In the *epicenter* of the opt out movement, it was discovered that parents of 20% of the public school students in New York State chose to opt their students out of state testing in 2015 and 2016 (Pizmony-Levy & Cosman, 2017). In Colorado, between the years 2011 and 2014, no district fell below the required 95% participation in state testing yet, in 2015, some school districts reported participation as low as 60% (Clayton et al., 2019). Grade 9 participation in the Colorado state assessment dropped from 98% in 2014 to 75% in 2015 (Clayton et al., 2019). New York State school districts found that schools with lower test scores in 2014 had higher opt out rates in 2015, which could have occurred if opting out was encouraged by parents or district staff for students who did not perform well in 2014 (Bennett, 2016). Bennett (2016) also

reported higher levels of opt out among high school students over elementary students and proposed this could be due to high school students feeling little reason to participate.

In New York, Chingos (2015) found higher opt out rates in more affluent districts and, when controlling for socioeconomic status (SES), in districts with lower test scores. In New York City public schools, which are predominantly low-income and Black or Latino, only 1.4% of parents opted their children out of testing (Ryan, 2016). Researchers evaluated the opt out trend in Colorado and found that the majority of students who were opted out of testing were White, attending higher-performing schools with fewer students receiving free and reduced-priced lunch benefits (Clayton et al., 2019). Students who were anticipated to do well on the assessments were being opted out by parents (Clayton et al., 2019). Similar findings were reported in New York with lower opt out rates among economically disadvantaged districts (Chingos, 2015). Results of a national survey on opting out found that those who chose to opt their students out of testing were "highly educated, white, married, politically liberal" parents (Pizmony-Levy & Saraisky, 2016, p. 6). Pizmony-Levy and Saraisky (2016) also reported that opted out students attended public school and their median household income exceeded the national average. Other researchers have stated that the opt out movement has also taken root in low-income schools and communities of color (Foster, 2016; Schniedewind & Tanis, 2017; Wilson et al., 2016). In one school in New York where 81% of the students were classified as low-income, 50% of students opted out of the 2016 assessment (Wilson et al., 2016). Wilson et al. (2016) argued that "…aggregate and state-level numbers often mask the activism in many communities of color…" (p. 235). Researchers have postulated that economically disadvantaged parents may lack access to information about test refusal rights, or they may defer

to the perceived experts about what is best for their students (Clayton et al., 2019; Schniedewind & Tanis, 2017).

Minnesota demographics. The state of Minnesota has also experienced a significant increase in students not taking the state MCA. In 2013, nearly 1,700 MCAs were not taken (State of Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor Program Evaluation Division, 2017). In 2016, the number of MCAs not taken jumped significantly to almost 12,000 (State of Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor Program Evaluation Division, 2017). Three different MCAs are administered in schools: Reading, Math, and Science. It should be noted that the number of tests not taken does not necessarily correlate to the number of students who refused to participate in testing. For example, a single Grade 8 student who opts out of the Math, Reading, and Science MCAs is counted as three opt outs.

Grade level. Minneapolis Public Schools was reportedly the district most affected by the opt out movement, with over 55% of eligible Grade 10 students and over 60% of eligible Grade 11 students refusing to participate in the 2016 MCA (State of Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor Program Evaluation Division, 2017). In 2018, half of the high school students in Hopkins High School, 46% of St. Louis Park Districts' high school students, and 91% of students in Patrick Henry High School in Minneapolis did not take the Math MCA (Golden & Webster, 2019). Another source reported that, in 2016, 95% of Grade 11 students in one Minneapolis high school did not take the Math MCA (Hinrichs, 2017). Discussions of grade level opt out data were focused on high schools as opposed to elementary and middle schools. According to a 2017 Evaluation Report from the Office of the Legislative Auditor, most of the test refusals occur at the high school level (State of Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor Program Evaluation Division, 2017, p. 79).

Subject. Depending on the grade level, Minnesota students are required to take MCA exams in three subject areas, Math, Reading, and Science. The results of Math and Reading MCAs are used in the accountability data for Minnesota. One article indicated that, in 2018, more students opted not to sit for the Math MCA over the Reading MCA (Golden & Webster, 2019). No other information was available that indicated which subject was opted out of most frequently.

School type. Opting out of the MCA has been reported in public charter schools and traditional public schools (Golden & Webster, 2019). No information was found that correlated the percentageage of opt outs with the type of school.

School enrollment size. As with school type, opting out of assessments happens in small schools and large ones (Golden & Webster, 2019). One report cited the opt outs were located more in the Twin Cities metropolitan area (State of Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor Program Evaluation Division, 2017). No sources were found that specifically linked the percentageage of opt outs with the size of the school attended.

Socioeconomics. Based on the lack of information, no connection could be made regarding socioeconomic data and the MCA opt out data.

Why Opt out?

Nationwide. The growth of the opt out movement has been attributed to parental objections to the adoption of the Common Core and the emphasis placed on mandatory standardized assessment. Like Colorado and New York, Florida experienced protests as parents, primarily mothers, fought against high-stakes testing, which they saw as "an outgrowth of neoliberal violence" (Schroeder et al., 2020, p. 143).

A 2016 national survey of the opt out movement found 36.9% of those surveyed were opposed to the use of standardized test scores to evaluate teachers (Pizmony-Levy & Saraisky, 2016). Other reasons given for opting out included objections to the corporatization of education, the narrowing of curriculum, and the Common Core (Pizmony-Levy & Saraisky, 2016). A survey by Pizmony-Levy and Cosman (2017) revealed the following reasons parents cited for their involvement in the opt out movement: opposition to the common core (46.9%); teachers are forced to teach to the test (44.5%); their children do not perform well on standardized tests (19.5%); opposition to using student test scores to evaluate teachers (18.7%); too much instructional time lost to testing (14.7%); and opposition to the role of the federal government in education (13.1%).

Minnesota. While no literature was located that specifically addressed the reasons for test opt outs in Minnesota, the *Star Tribune* reported one parent opted her student out due to the "increased emphasis of the importance of the test" (Golden & Webster, 2019). The article by Golden and Webster (2019) also reported a superintendent hearing that parents had concerns about too much testing and the negative effects of test anxiety in their children.

Implications

Nationwide. For schools and districts, the implications of students opting out of testing present challenges for school administrators across the nation. On the surface, opting out appears to be a matter of personal choice. However, when too many students opt out, the standardized assessment can no longer be considered a valid tool to determine equality and accountability (Wilson et al., 2017).

Minnesota. In Minnesota, students who opt out of the MCA are recorded as *not proficient* in the school accountability data. With this in mind, if high-performing students are

opting out of testing, district test scores would, in theory, drop, skewing accountability data and resulting in districts not meeting required benchmarks. Conversely, if low-performing students are opting out, the data would not be useful in measuring school level academic growth or narrowing the achievement gap. In light of the increasing number of opt outs, the 2017 Minnesota report stated that MCA scores for individual students are valid, yet these scores cannot be considered an accurate measure of districtwide outcomes for Minneapolis Public Schools (State of Minnesota Office of the Legislative Auditor Program Evaluation Division, 2017). At some point the number of test refusals calls into question the usefulness of that data. Based on the concerning trend of increasing numbers of students not participating in the MCAs, the purpose of this study was to examine what variables are significantly related to the percentage of testing opt outs.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Purpose of the Study

Standardized testing is not new and neither are the controversies surrounding it. Federal education reform through the years placed an increasing emphasis on the use of state-mandated testing as an accountability measurement of academic progress. Among the onerous requirements of the 2002 No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) states were required to have test participation rates of 95%. In 2015, the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) replaced NCLB, yet ESSA retained the required 95% assessment participation rates. ESSA also allowed states to develop policies that permit families to opt out of testing. When test participation rates drop below 95% at the school, district, or state level, accountability data may be flawed. The purpose of this study was to analyze specific variables associated with test refusals in Minnesota to determine if any relationships exist. Understanding variables and patterns associated with test refusal data in Minnesota is a critical first step in addressing the accuracy of accountability data.

Theoretical Framework

This study was based on Bourdieu's theory of cultural capital. Bourdieu defined cultural capital as the "ideas and knowledge people draw upon as they participate in social life" (Johnson, 2000, p. 70). Lamont and Lareau (1988) defined "cultural capital as widely shared, legitimate culture made up of high status cultural signals (attitudes, preferences, behaviors, and goods) used in direct or indirect social and cultural exclusion" (p. 165). Cultural capital includes sets of beliefs, knowledge, and ideas that a family possesses and are transmitted from one generation to the next. Bourdieu believed that families rich in cultural capital possess influence and information that perpetuate social and educational inequalities (Clayton et al., 2018). Children

raised in high cultural capital homes have access to educational advantages and resources to which others do not have access (Andersen & Hansen, 2012; Clayton et al., 2018).

Children from families with more cultural capital "enter school with key social and cultural cues, while working class and lower class students must acquire the knowledge and skills to negotiate their educational experience after they enter school" (Lamont & Lareau, 1988, p. 155). Students learn behavior from their parents, and those who know how to act in school based on established norms are more likely to have educational advantages (Clayton et al., 2018). Families that possess an abundance of cultural capital interact with teachers and schools in a way that differs from families with less cultural capital. Families with lower cultural capital reported feeling intimidated, powerless, and ineffectual, when interacting with the school (Lareau, 2002). However, families with more cultural capital were more active and assertive in their school interactions, and were not afraid to challenge the institution (Lareau, 2002). Neill (2016) stated that low-income families lack resources and access to information making it more difficult for them to organize around opting out. Low-income families are more vulnerable to being bullied into taking standardized tests fearing that funding would be withheld from their already struggling school (Neill, 2016).

As applied to this study, the theory of cultural capital would indicate that families rich in cultural capital have access to the information needed to opt out of mandated testing, and they are not afraid to challenge the system. Lareau (2002) also found that students with higher cultural capital were more likely to assert themselves in school. Students who are willing to advocate for themselves in school may explain student standardized test refusals.

Research Design

The research method used for this study was a quantitative, ex-post-facto design. The Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA) data were previously published and publicly available from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE). Socioeconomic, employment, and level of education data were from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) and were also previously published and publicly available.

Research Questions

Research Question 1. Is there a significant relationship between school variables (i.e., grade level, academic subject, school type, school enrollment size, proportion of special education students, and socioeconomics) and the percentage of students who are opted out of MCA testing?

Ho1. There are no significant relationships between school variables and the percentage of students who are opted out of the MCA tests.

Ha1. There are significant relationships between school variables and the percentage of students who are opted out of the MCA tests.

Research Question 2. Is there a significant relationship between school variables (i.e., grade level, academic subject, school type, school enrollment size, proportion of special education students, and socioeconomics) and the odds of schools meeting compliance with an opt out rate of less than 5%?

Ho2. There are no significant relationships between school variables and the odds of schools meeting compliance with an opt out rate of less than 5%.

Ha2. There are significant relationships between school variables and the odds of schools meeting compliance with an opt out rate of less than 5%.

Sample

The sample for this study included all Minnesota school districts that reported MCA data in 2018. Schools and districts included in this analysis are traditional public schools and public charter schools. Private schools are not required to administer the MCA, and while some schools choose to do so, data collected from private schools was excluded from this study.

Instrumentation/Protocol

The data set analyzed was from all Minnesota public schools and public charter schools that reported MCA scores in 2018. The term refusal rather than opt out was used in the MDE file to denote the percentage who chose not to participate in the MCA. The MDE data includes two columns of refusal data, parent and student. Student refusals include those who are present on the day of testing but, for some reason, refuse to participate in the testing. For this study, the opt out data used was a sum of the percentage of parent and student test refusals.

Economic, education, and employment data was from the USDA Economic Research Service. The economic data used in this study was the estimated percentage of households at the poverty level per county in Minnesota. The education data used in this study was the percentage of adults age 25 or older in each county that completed college. County-level median household income was also used to help answer the research questions posed. All of the county-level data was publicly available information.

This study used secondary data from the year 2018 because this was the most recent data available. MDE collects MCA data yearly and uses it for several purposes, including measuring school and district academic performance. The USDA Economic Research Service compiled data from the Census Bureau, the Bureau of Labor Statistics, and The American Community Survey. The data used in this study was collected from reputable sources and was deemed

reliable. The validity of the data was controlled for by the use of consistent variables and measurement tools.

Data Collection

MCA opt out data are publicly available and was obtained from MDE Data Reports and Analytics, Assessment and Growth files. Private school data was filtered out of the data set, which left the sample for this study, MCA data for traditional public schools and public charter schools. The variables associated with the MCA data were reviewed and those labeled as test "refusals" were selected to represent opt out decisions. Test refusal data was selected for Math and Reading only. Science data was not used in this study because Science data are not used in the accountability calculation by MDE. Once the sample and MCA variables were identified, county-level socioeconomic data for Minnesota was gathered from the USDA. The following socioeconomic variables were identified and merged with the MCA data: percentage poverty, 2019 percentage unemployment, median household income, 2013 rural/urban code, and 2018 percentage college completion.

Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using JASP, Jeffreys Amazing Statistics Program (JASP Team, 2020). A multiple linear regression was used to determine the relationship between the dependent variable, opt out data, and multiple independent variables. A multiple regression model is suggested when studying the relationship between a single dependent variable and several independent variables (Cresswell & Cresswell, 2018). Specifically, in this study, a regression was used to answer the first research question to determine if there are statistically significant differences in the MCA opt out rates when comparing the variables of grade-level

tested, subject tested, school type, school enrollment size, and identified socioeconomic variables. The percentageage of testing opt outs serves as the dependent variable.

A binary logistic regression produces odds ratios and is used when there is a dependent variable with two categories (Muijs, 2011). In this study, a binary logistic regression was used to analyze the odds of schools meeting testing compliance under ESSA with an opt out rate less than 5%.

Reliability, Validity, Trustworthiness

Reliability, validity, and trustworthiness was addressed on different levels in this study. Reliability, synonymous with consistency, means that a test yields consistent results whereas validity refers to a test measuring what it was designed to measure (Orcher, 2014; Patten & Newhart, 2018). Muijs (2011) identified reliability and validity as essential in quantitative research and stated that "validity is probably the single most important aspect of the design of any instrument in educational research" (p. 57). In this study, reliability and validity were considered in the instruments used to answer the research questions and in the sets of secondary data used.

The validity and reliability of the MCA data was discussed in the *2017-18 Technical Manual for Minnesota's MCA and MTAS Assessments* (MDE, 2018a). Validity of the MCA was measured by the alignment of the assessment content with the standards. A designated committee and a panel of classroom teachers developed test specifications specifically aligned with academic standards in each subject and grade. The creation of test items requires rigorous review followed by an evaluation from an independent contractor. Test development goes through multiple reviews to ensure that the MCA does not unfairly discriminate between student groups and to confirm that it measures intended skills (MDE, 2018a).

Reliability of the MCA can vary depending on the sample. In consideration of the variance in reliability, estimates of reliability are provided overall for each group of students based on gender and race. Neither test-retest nor alternate forms reliability were used as estimations of MCA reliability. Test-retest reliability would require the same student to take the same test at a different time. A long interval between test-retest cannot account for student growth and a short interval cannot control for recall of questions and repetition of answers (MDE, 2018a). Alternate forms reliability would require students to take two equivalent forms of a test thereby extending time spent testing. "Reducing the frequency of testing students provides more time for the students in the classroom as well as limits the item pool usage per grade, meaning fewer items must be developed and maintained" (MDE, 2018a, p. 143). Minnesota assessments are developed to control for factors that may influence test scores therefore, an estimation of internal consistency is the primary measure used to determine reliability (MDE, 2018a).

The USDA data were extracted from U.S. Census Bureau data. Census results are subject to nonsampling and sampling error (United States Census Bureau, 2012). Quality control procedures are implemented by the Census Bureau to reduce the effects of nonsampling errors (United States Census Bureau, 2012). Measures of sampling variability are not "provided for sample-based estimates derived from the economic census…" (United States Census Bureau, 2012, n.p.). The Urban Wire (2019) reported that the 2010 census population count was within 0.01% of the actual total and as a result is considered one of the most accurate reports.

To control for reliability and validity in this study, consistent measures were used to evaluate the relationship between the dependent and independent variables. During data input,

analysis, and interpretation, the researcher remained in close contact with an expert in quantitative data procedures.

Trustworthiness is directly related to the credibility of the researcher (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Panter and Sterba (2011) identified trustworthiness as the most important principle in professional ethics. As applied to research, trustworthiness means being honest and conducting a study with "a focus on the most methodologically valid result" (p. 31) which could differ from the researcher's desired end result (Panter & Sterba, 2011). In this study, the reported results were free of researcher preconceived ideas and were interpreted without bias. To avoid bias in this study, the data analysis methods were chosen based on the appropriateness of the tools rather than to confirm a hypothesis and the results were reviewed with a data expert.

Limitations/Delimitations

Data collection itself can be a limitation in research. In this study, relying on secondary data from reliable sources, MDE and USDA, may decrease some of the limitations inherent in data collection. However, a limitation of this study was the potential for human error in the compiling of the data and the data entry process. Another limitation of this study was the use of data from 2018 rather than data from the most recent school year. Due to the COVID-19 global pandemic, MCAs were not administered during the 2019-2020 school year.

When merging two MDE data files, MCA data with special education and free and reduced-price meal data, it was discovered that school names were not consistent between the files. For example, a school may be listed as an Intermediate School in one file and a Middle School in another file. As a result, another limitation of this study was the exclusion of opt out data from 289 schools.

A delimitation of this study was restricting the MCA opt out percentage to those data sets identified as parent and student test refusals. The opt out data used in this study did not consider the number of students who were reported absent on the day of testing. While some absences may be legitimate, keeping students' home may be an indirect way for parents to opt their students out of the MCAs. This study also excluded students whose behavior resulted in unfinished MCAs, which could be a student's way of opting themselves out of testing. While absent students and tests not completed due to behavior may be alternative ways of protesting the MCA, there was no way this could be confirmed.

Another delimitation of this study was limiting the analysis to MCA opt out data only. The Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS) is an alternative assessment administered to special education students with significant cognitive disabilities who are deemed eligible for the alternate assessment by the Individualized Education Program (IEP) team. Parents are allowed to opt their students out of the MTAS as they would the MCA. Under ESSA's requirements, the percentageage of students who take the MTAS is not to exceed 1% statewide in each subject area. Due to the limited number of students eligible to participate in the MTAS, the MTAS opt out data was excluded from this study.

Ethical Issues

Ethics must be considered during all stages of a research study, beginning with the initial proposal to the final reporting of results, and sharing data (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). In empirical research, ethical misconduct may be present in each of these stages of the research process. The Belmont Report (1979) outlines several ethical principles that must be adhered to when conducting research that involves human subjects. For this study, the ethical principles of respect for persons, beneficence, and justice were considered and met. The principle of

beneficence was met through the design of this study, which required no direct contact with human subjects nor the collection of identifying information. Respect for persons and justice was demonstrated by the careful and accurate handling of secondary data publicly available from MDE and USDA. The use of data from MDE and USDA did not require permission from these organizations. Ethical standards were maintained throughout the research process.

Chapter 4: Results

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to analyze specific school variables (i.e., grade level, academic subject, school type, school enrollment size, and socioeconomics) associated with opting out of the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA). Under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), states are required to test at least 95% of their students using standardized assessments. Furthermore, they are obligated to annually report test results to be eligible to receive federal funding. The results of state-mandates assessments are used to hold teachers and schools accountable for student achievement. For each student opted out of the MCA the school receives a score of *not proficient* which could skew accountability data. Understanding variables associated with MCA opt out rates will guide future research; may potentially lead to policy changes in educational assessment; and may serve as a platform to create initiatives to educate parents, teachers, and administrators about the importance of standardized testing.

Discussion of the Sample

The sample for this study included all Minnesota Traditional Public Schools and Public Charter Schools that administered the MCA in 2018. Private schools are not required to administer the MCA, and as a result private school data were excluded from this study. Reading data from 1,323 schools and Math data from 1,357 schools were analyzed as part of this study.

Coding of the Data

Analysis of multiple variables in Jeffery's Amazing Statistics Program (JASP) required some data to be dummy coded. Dummy coding is the process of assigning a 1 or a 0 to variables with multiple groups which allows the groups to be compared to a common referent. District Type was one variable that required dummy coding. The data file from Minnesota Department

of Education (MDE) included several distinct district codes, as seen in Table 4. For the purpose of this study, all districts coded as 01, 03, and 06 in the MDE data were considered Traditional Public Schools and assigned a code of "1." Public Charter School Districts, 07 in MDE data, were coded as "0" and served as the common referent. Remaining Districts were not used in this study because few of them were represented in the MDE data file.

Table 4

MDE District Type

Code	Description
01	Independent
02	Common (Prinsburg, #815 and Franconia #323; no students directly served)
03	Special (Minneapolis #1, and South St. Paul #6)
06	Intermediate (Hennepin Technical #287, Northeast Metropolitan #916, and Dakota County #917)
07	Charter/Outcome-Based School
34	Tribal Contract/Grant
35	Private Alternative District
50	Miscellaneous Cooperative
51	Secondary Vocational Cooperative
52	Special Education Cooperative
53	Vocational and Special Education Cooperative
60	Department of Corrections School
61	Education District
62	Cooperative Secondary Facilities District, Deseg. School Districts
70	State Academies for the Deaf/Blind, School for the Arts
83	Service Cooperatives

(MDE, 2011, p. 27)

The next variable that required dummy coding was Grade Level. Grade Level was identified as School Classification in the MDE data file. The MDE codes for School Classification are in Table 5. Schools classified as a 10, Elementary Schools, were coded as a "0" and considered the common referent. Three columns were added to the data sheet to separate out the other grade levels, Senior High School, Middle School/Junior High School, and Secondary 7-12 School. Remaining school classifications were excluded from this study.

Table 5

MDE School Classification Codes

Code	Grade Level Description
10	Public Elementary School (PK-6 or PK-8)
20	Public Middle School (Grades 5-8)
31	Public Junior High School (Grades 7-8 or 7-9)
32	Public Senior High School (Grades 9-12 or 10-12)
33	Public Secondary Schools (Grades 7-12)
40	Public Open School (Grades K-12)
41	Public Area Learning Center (ALC)
42	Public Secondary Alternative Program (ALP)
43	Contract Alternative Program
44	Learning Year Program
45	ALC Targeted Services
46	Online/Distance Learning
50	Special Education School/Program
51	Special Education ESY (Extended School Year)
55	Combination of Special Ed and Secondary Vocational School/Program
60	Secondary Vocational School/Program
70	Delinquent Student/Correctional School
71	Miscellaneous Program or Center
72	Neglected School Program
73	Homeless School/Program
74	Hospital/Medical School/Program
75	Telecommunications
76	Educational Oversight to Private Residential Care and Treatment
77	Educational Oversight to Public Residential Care and Treatment
78	Educational Oversight to Private Day Treatment Program
79	Educational Oversight to Public Day Treatment Program

(MDE, 2019, p. 16)

Interpretation of Research Question 1 Data

Research Question 1. Is there a significant relationship between school variables (i.e., grade level, school type, school enrollment size, proportion of special education students, and socioeconomics) and the percentage of students who are opted out of MCA testing?

The data for Research Question 1 were analyzed using a multiple linear regression model in JASP. Multiple regression is used to estimate the relationship between one dependent variable

and two or more independent variables. This method allows estimation of how a dependent variable changes as the independent variables change. The regression equation is $y = \beta_0 + \beta_1 X_1 + \cdots + \beta_n X_n + \varepsilon$, where:

- y is the predicted value of the dependent variable,
- β_0 is the y-intercept (value of y when all other parameters are set to 0),
- $\beta_1 X_1$ is the regression coefficient (β_1) of the first independent variable (X_1) (the effect that increasing the value of the independent variable has on the predicted y value),
- … the same for each independent variable in the model,
- $\beta_n X_n$ is the regression coefficient of the final independent variable, and
- ε is the model error (the amount of variation in the estimate of y) (Bevans, 2020).

Parallel multiple linear regression models were run for the dependent variables reflecting opt out data for academic subjects, Reading and Math respectively. The 11 independent variables (X_n) remained constant in each model. A Durbin-Watson test of autocorrelation was completed to evaluate the degree of similarity between variables. This test reports a value from 0 to 4 with a value less than 2 denoting a positive autocorrelation. In this study, the Durbin-Watson value for both Reading and Math, was less than 2. The variance inflation factor (VIF) was used to evaluate the correlation between the independent variables. Variables with a high degree of correlation, a VIF over 10, indicates concern because the variables are too closely related resulting in less reliable results. The initial run of the data revealed a VIF > 10 for the Median Household Income variable which was too similar to Percentage Unemployment and Percentage Poverty variables. As a result, Median Household Income was removed from the final models. Models were evaluated with a significance $p < 0.05$. The same significance level was used at the variable level to identify a statistically significant relationship between the dependent and independent variable, holding all other variables constant.

Reading

The overall regression model for Reading MCA opt out was significant [$F(11, 1{,}311) = 6.098$, $p < 0.001$] and accounted for 4.9% (R^2) of the variance leaving 95.1% unexplained. The R^2 is a measure of how well the predictor variables predict the outcome (Muijs, 2011). An R^2 of < 0.1 suggests that the independent variables identified are not good predictors (Muijs, 2011) of opt out data for Reading. Despite the low R^2, there were statistically significant relationships between some of the independent variables and the percentage opting out of Reading MCA.

As seen in Table 6, for the 1,323 schools who were included in the Reading MCA analysis, the average percentage reading refused was 1.0% (SD = 3.2%, 0% to 68%), the average percentage poverty was 10.0% (SD = 3.3%, range 3.8% to 20.9%), the average 2019 percentage unemployed was 3.5% (SD = 0.9%, range 2.3% to 8.2%), the average rural urban continuum code was 3.1 (SD = 2.6%, range 1% to 9%), and the average percentage college completion was 32.5% (SD = 11.6%, range 12.2% to 49.2%). The average enrollment was 522 students (SD = 417, range 12 to 3,406), the average percentage of students receiving Special Education Services was 16.3% (SD = 8.3%, range 0% to 90%), and the average percentage of students eligible for free or reduced priced meals was 39.7% (SD = 21.8%, range 0% to 90%). Of the 1,323 participating schools in the Reading MCA analysis, 91% were Traditional Public Schools, 14% were classified as Middle or Junior High Schools, 16% were High Schools, and 13% were Secondary 7-12 Schools.

Table 6

Descriptive Statistics for Reading

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Range
Percentage Reading Refused	1,323	1.0	3.2	0 to 68
Percentage Poverty	1,323	10.0	3.3	3.8 to 20.9
2019 Percentage Unemployed	1,323	3.5	0.9	2.3 to 8.2
2013 Rural Urban Continuum Code	1,323	3.1	2.6	1.0 to 9.0
2018 Percentage College Completion	1,323	32.5	11.6	12.2 to 49.2
Percentage Students Receiving Special Education Services	1,323	16.2	8.3	0 to 90
Percentage Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Priced Meals	1,323	39.7	21.8	0 to 90
Total Enrollment	1,323	511.7	417.8	12 to 3,406
District Type – Traditional Public Schools	1,323	0.91	0.29	0 to 1
MS/JH School Classification	1,323	0.14	0.35	0 to 1
HS School Classification	1,323	0.16	0.37	0 to 1
Secondary 7-12 School Classification	1,323	0.13	0.34	0 to 1

N = Sample size, the number of schools included in this study.
Mean = The average for each variable given the sample size.
SD = Standard Deviation measures how spread out the dataset is. The higher the SD the more spread out the data points are.

Results. Examining MCA opt out variables for Reading revealed statistically significant relationships for Grade Level, District Type (Traditional Public v. Public Charter), Enrollment size, Percentage Special Education, and Percentage Free and Reduced-Price Lunch. See Table 7.

Lower opt out rates for the Reading MCA were found in Traditional Public Schools as compared to Public Charter Schools. There were also lower opt out rates in schools with higher percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced-Priced Meals. Higher opt out rates were found at the High School grade level compared to Elementary School. Furthermore, schools with larger enrollment numbers and a larger percentage of students receiving Special Education Services also demonstrated higher opt out rates.

Socioeconomic variables (Percentage Poverty, Percentage Unemployed, Rural Urban Continuum Code, and Percentage College Completion) were not significantly related to Reading MCA opt outs. Furthermore, Middle School/Junior High School and 7-12 Secondary Schools did not have significantly higher or lower Reading MCA opt out scores compared to Elementary Schools.

Table 7

Research Question 1, Reading MCA Opt out Variables

Variable	B	SE	ß	Significant
(Intercept)	1.03	0.09		
Percentage Poverty	0.06	0.03	0.06	
2019 Percentage Unemployed	-0.08	0.15	-0.02	
2013 Rural Urban Continuum Code	0.01	0.05	0.01	
2018 Percentage College Completion	0.02	0.01	0.07	
District Type – Traditional Public Schools	-1.10	0.32	-0.10	***
MS/JH School Classification	0.04	0.26	0.01	
HS School Classification	0.94	0.27	0.11	***
Secondary 7-12 School Classification	0.19	0.28	0.02	
Total Enrollment	0.01	0.01	0.09	**
Total Percentage Students Receiving Special Education Services	0.03	0.01	0.08	**
Total Percentage Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Priced Meals	-0.01	0.01	-0.09	**
R^2				0.049

*Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$*

Math

The overall regression model for Math MCA opt outs was significant [$F(11, 1{,}345) = 8.419$, $p < 0.001$] and accounted for 6.4% (R^2) of the variance leaving 93.6% unexplained. Despite the low R^2, there were statistically significant relationships between some of the independent variables and the percentage opting out of Math MCA. Examining MCA opt out

variables for Math revealed statistically significant relationships for Grade Level and Percentage Special Education.

As seen in Table 8, for the 1,357 schools who were included in the Math MCA analysis, the average percentage Math refused was 1.4% (SD = 4.5%, 0% to 67%), the average percentage poverty was 10.0% (SD = 3.3%, range 3.8% to 20.9%), the average 2019 percentage unemployed was 3.5% (SD = 0.9%, range 2.3% to 8.2%), the average rural urban continuum code was 3.1 (SD = 2.6%, range 1% to 9%), and the average percentage college completion was 32.6% (SD = 11.6%, range 12.2% to 49.2%). The average enrollment was 512 students (SD = 417, range 12 to 3,406), the average percentage of students receiving Special Education Services was 16.3% (SD = 8.9%, range 0% to 90%), and the average percentage of students eligible for Free or Reduced-Priced Meals was 40.0% (SD = 21.8%, range 0% to 90%). Of the 1,323 participating schools in the Math MCA analysis, 91% were Traditional Public Schools, 14% were classified as Middle or Junior High Schools, 16% were High Schools, and 13% were Secondary 7-12 Schools.

Table 8

Descriptive Statistics for Math

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Range
Percentage Math Refused	1,357	1.4	4.5	0 to 67
Percentage Poverty	1,357	10.0	3.3	3.8 to 20.9
2019 Percentage Unemployed	1,357	3.5	0.9	2.3 to 8.2
2013 Rural Urban Continuum Code	1,357	3.1	2.6	1.0 to 9.0
2018 Percentage College Completion	1,357	32.6	11.6	12.2 to 49.2
Percentage Students Receiving Special Education Services	1,357	16.3	8.9	0 to 90
Percentage Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Priced Meals	1,357	40.0	21.8	0 to 90
Total Enrollment	1,357	511.7	417.8	12 to 3,406
District Type – Traditional Public Schools	1,357	0.91	0.29	0 to 1

MS/JH School Classification	1,357	0.14	0.34	0 to 1
HS School Classification	1,357	0.18	0.38	0 to 1
Secondary 7-12 School Classification	1,357	0.13	0.34	0 to 1

N = Sample size, the number of schools included in this study.
Mean = The average for each variable given the sample size.
SD = Standard Deviation measures how spread out the dataset is. The higher the SD the more spread out the data points are.

Results. Math MCA opt out data results revealed statistically significant findings, $p < 0.05$, for the variables of Grade Level and Percentage Special Education. See Table 9. Math MCA opt out results revealed higher opt out rates among High School students as compared to students in Elementary Schools. Higher opt out rates were also found in schools with higher percentage of students receiving Special Education Services.

Table 9

Summary of Math MCA Opt out Findings

Variable	B	SE	ß	Significant
(Intercept)	1.39	0.12		
Percentage Poverty	0.04	0.04	0.03	
2019 Percentage Unemployed	-0.13	0.20	-0.03	
2013 Rural Urban Continuum Code	-0.02	0.07	-0.01	
2018 Percentage College Completion	0.02	0.02	0.06	
District Type – Traditional Public Schools	-0.76	0.44	-0.05	
MS/JH School Classification	0.09	0.37	0.01	
HS School Classification	2.51	0.34	0.21	***
Secondary 7-12 School Classification	0.40	0.39	0.03	
Total Enrollment	0.01	0.01	0.05	
Total Percentage Students Receiving Special Education Services	0.03	0.01	0.06	*
Total Percentage Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Priced Meals	-0.01	0.01	-0.04	
R^2				0.064

*Note: * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$, *** $p < 0.001$*

Research Question 1 Significant Findings

A summary of statistically significant findings as they relate to the independent variable follows:

Grade Level. More opt outs were noted at the High School level as compared to Elementary School for both the Reading and Math MCA.

Subject. The mean for opt outs was slightly higher for the Math MCA, 1.4%, compared to the Reading MCA, 1.0%. The range for opt outs was very similar with a range of 0-67 for Math and 0-68 for Reading. No significant difference in opt outs between Reading and Math were found.

School Type. Public Charter Schools, compared to Traditional Public Schools were found to have a higher rate of opt outs for the Reading MCA. No statistical significance was found in the Math MCA analysis.

School enrollment size. Schools with larger enrollment numbers and a larger percentage of students receiving Special Education Services were found to have higher opt out rates for the Reading MCA. Math MCA analysis revealed higher opt out rates were found in schools with higher percentage of students receiving Special Education Services.

Socioeconomics. Reading MCA data analysis revealed lower opt out rates were found in schools with a higher percentage of Free and Reduced-Priced eligible students. No other statistically significant relationships were found between socioeconomics and MCA opt outs.

Interpretation of Research Question 2 Data

Research Question 2. Is there a significant relationship between school variables (i.e., grade level, school type, school enrollment size, proportion of special education students, and

socioeconomics) and the odds of schools meeting compliance with an opt out rate of less than 5%?

Research Question 2 data was analyzed using a logistic regression model to determine if there was a relationship between school variables and the odds of schools meeting testing compliance with an opt out rate less than 5%. In other words, do the independent variables predict the likelihood of Reading and Math MCA opt out rates exceeding 5%. In JASP, schools with an opt out rate greater than 5% were coded as a '1' and compared to schools with opt out rates equal to or less than 5%.

The overall regression models for Reading MCA [$\chi^2(1,309) = 51.885$, $p < 0.001$; McFadden $R^2 = 0.118$] and Math [$\chi^2(1,344) = 86.572$, $p < 0.001$; McFadden $R^2 = 0.141$]. Values between 0.2 and 0.4 for McFadden R^2 are considered excellent fit (Domencich & McFadden, 1975). Despite the low R^2, there were statistically significant relationships between some of the independent variables and whether the Reading and Math MCA opt out exceeded 5%.

Results. Analysis of the Reading and Math MCA opt out data revealed statistically significant relationships between the variables of District Type, Grade Level, and Percentage Special Education and the odds of meeting testing compliance with an opt out rate of less than 5%. Traditional Public schools are less likely to be non-compliant with the federal testing requirement of 95% compared to Public Charter Schools. High Schools and schools with larger percentage of special education population are less likely to be compliant with a required opt out rate of less than 5%. Findings related to Reading and Math 5% MCA opt out rates are located in Table 10 and 11 respectively.

The Odds Ratios (OR) were examined for each data set, Reading and Math. The OR for predictor variables "…is defined as the amount by which the odds of the outcome increase (OR

greater than 1.0) or decrease (OR less than 1.0) when the value of the predictor variable is increased by 1 unit" (Muijs, 2011, p. 158). The Reading 5% opt out data in Table 10 revealed that for every unit increase in the percentageage of special education students, the odds of being out of compliance with the opt out rate of less than 5% increased by 4% (OR = 1.04, $p < 0.001$). Traditional Public Schools are 3.03 times less likely of being out of compliance (OR = 1/0.33, $p = 0.007$) compared to Public Charter Schools. And, High Schools had a 490% increase in the odds of being out of compliance compared to Elementary Schools.

Table 10

Reading 5% MCA Opt out Findings

			Wald Test		
School Variable	Odds Ratio	z	Wald Statistic	df	p-value
(Intercept)	0.02	-2.62	6.80	1	0.009
Percentage Poverty	1.01	0.25	0.06	1	0.802
2019 Percentage Unemployed	0.94	-0.22	0.05	1	0.826
2013 Rural Urban Continuum Code	1.06	0.59	0.35	1	0.554
2018 Percentage College Completion	1.02	0.98	0.96	1	0.327
Total Percentage Students Receiving Special Education Services	1.04	4.18	17.48	1	**< 0.001**
Total Percentage Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Priced Meals	0.99	-1.43	2.06	1	0.151
Total Enrollment	1.00	0.77	0.59	1	0.443
District Type	0.33	-2.68	7.18	1	**0.007**
Middle School/Junior High School	1.34	0.56	0.31	1	0.578
Senior High School	4.90	4.36	18.97	1	**< 0.001**
7-12 Secondary School	1.78	1.16	1.35	1	0.245

Table 11 contains the OR for the Math 5% opt out data. As indicated in the table, for every unit increase in the percentageage of special education students, the odds of being out of compliance with the opt out rate of less than 5% increased by 3% (OR = 1.03, $p < 0.001$). Traditional Public Schools are 2.38 times less likely of being out of compliance (OR = 1/0.42, p

= 0.015) compared to Public Charter Schools. And, High Schools had a 705% increase in the odds of being out of compliance compared to Elementary Schools.

Table 11

Math 5% MCA Opt out Findings

			Wald Test		
School Variable	Odds Ratio	z	Wald Statistic	df	p
(Intercept)	0.07	-1.97	3.89	1	0.048
Percentage Poverty	1.00	-0.05	0.01	1	0.960
2019 Percentage Unemployed	0.80	-0.94	0.87	1	0.350
2013 Rural Urban Continuum Code	1.01	0.11	0.01	1	0.911
2018 Percentage College Completion	1.01	0.29	0.08	1	0.772
Total Percentage Students Receiving Special Education Services	1.03	3.76	14.11	1	**< 0.001**
Total Percentage Students Eligible for Free or Reduced Priced Meals	0.99	-1.15	1.31	1	0.252
Total Enrollment	1.00	1.13	1.27	1	0.261
District Type	0.42	-2.42	5.87	1	**0.015**
Middle School/Junior High School	1.15	0.29	0.08	1	0.773
Senior High School	7.05	6.74	45.39	1	**< 0.001**
7-12 Secondary School	1.65	1.12	1.25	1	0.264

Research Question 2 Significant Findings

A summary of statistically significant findings for school variables follows:

Grade Level. Reading and Math MCA analysis revealed that High Schools compared to Elementary Schools are more likely to be non-compliant with the 95% federal testing mandate.

Subject. No statistically significant findings were noted for the subject tested, Reading or Math.

School Type. Traditional Public Schools were less likely to be non-compliant with the 95% testing requirement for both the Reading and Math MCA.

School Enrollment Size. For both the Reading and Math MCA, schools with a larger percentage of students receiving Special Education Services were less likely to be in compliance

with less than a 5% opt out rate. There were no other statistically significant findings for Reading or Math based on school enrollment size.

Socioeconomics. There were no statistically significant findings for socioeconomics.

Summary

This chapter analyzed the results for each research question. Data were collected from MDE data files and merged with socioeconomic data from the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). JASP was used to analyze the data.

Research Question 1 evaluated the relationship between specific school variables and Reading and Math MCA opt outs. Reading MCA opt out data showed lower rates of opt outs in Traditional Public Schools and schools with higher percentage of students eligible for Free and Reduced-Priced Meals. Higher Reading MCA opt out rates were found in High Schools, schools with higher enrollment, and schools with a larger percentage of students receiving Special Education Services. Math MCA opt out data indicated higher opt out rates among High School students and in schools with a larger percentage of students receiving Special Education Services.

Research Question 2 analyzed the relationship between specific school variables and the likelihood of meeting the federal testing requirement of 95%. Similar results were found between Reading and Math data with Public Charter Schools more likely to not meet the testing requirement of 95% as opposed to Traditional Public Schools. Furthermore, High Schools and schools with higher percentage of students receiving Special Education Services were also more likely to not meet testing compliance. Table 12 provides a status summary for the null hypotheses. Although there were only two research questions, each hypothesis was tested twice to evaluate Reading and Math data, separately.

Table 12

Null Hypotheses Status

Hypotheses	Accept or Reject
Ho1: There are no significant relationships between school variables and the percentage of students who are opted out of the Reading and Math MCA test.	Reject
Ho2: There are no significant relationships between school variables and the odds of meeting compliance with an opt out rate of less than 5%.	Reject

Chapter 4 discussed the data analysis process and findings related to the research questions posed. Findings, limitations, implications, and recommendations will be discussed in Chapter 5.

Concept Map

The concept map as seen in Figure 1 provides a visual summary of the dependent variables and the statistically significant independent variables. The independent variable, Total Percentage Students Receiving Special Education Services was significant in both research questions and for both Reading and Math MCA analyses. The independent variable Grade Level was significant for High Schools representing higher rates of opt outs for Reading and Math MCAs and less likely to be in compliance with less than 5% opt out rate.

Figure 1 MCA Opt out Concept Map

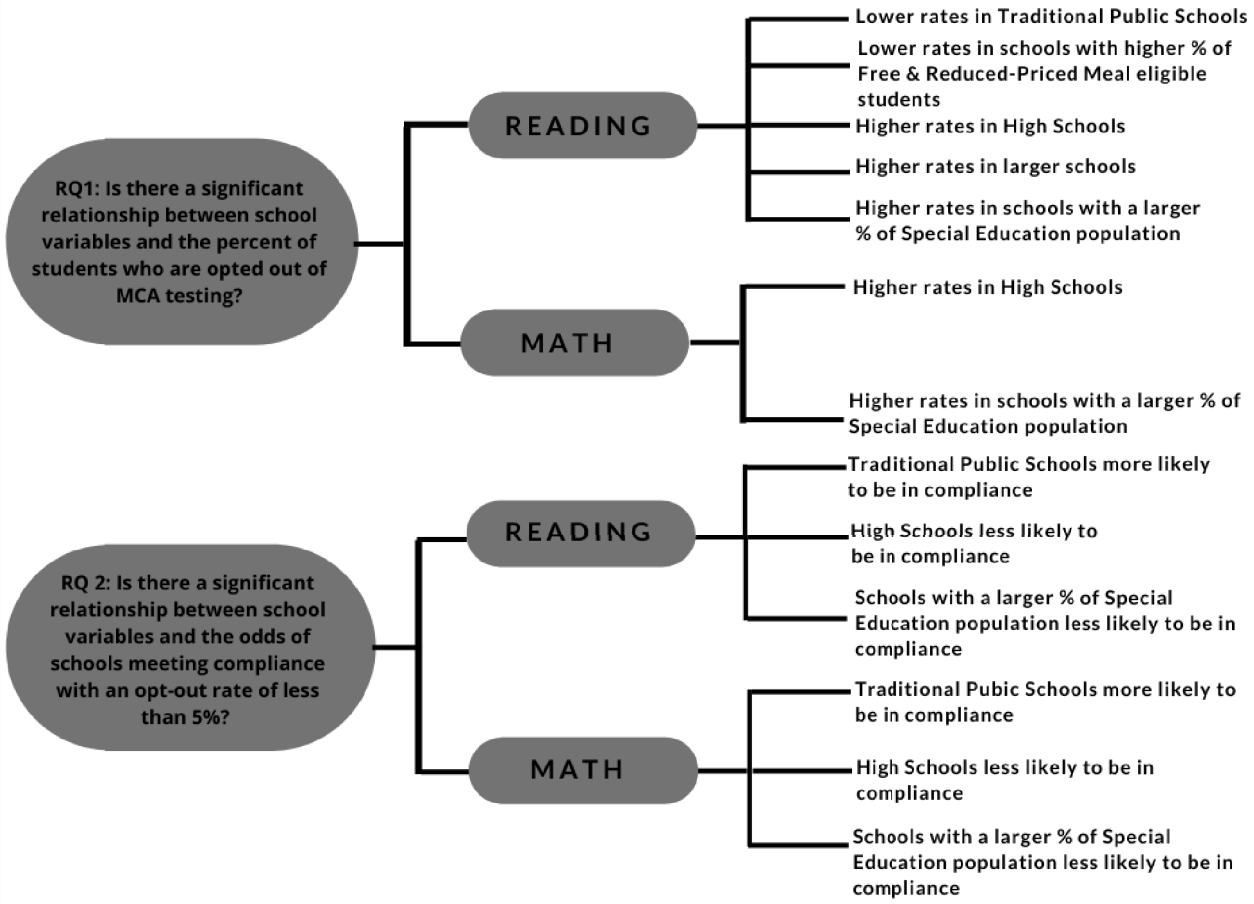

Figure 1. Research questions specific to math and reading, and the outcome of the data analysis.

Chapter 5: Discussion, Implications, Recommendations

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this quantitative study was to examine the school variables associated with opting out of the Reading and Math Minnesota Comprehensive Assessment (MCA). The data analyzed was from Traditional Public Schools and Public Charter Schools that reported MCA data in 2018. Publicly available secondary data was accessed from the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) and the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Data analysis and interpretation were completed with assistance from a data expert currently working as a Research Associate for the Institute on Community Integration at the University of Minnesota.

Research Questions

Research Question 1. Is there a significant relationship between school variables (i.e., grade level, academic subject, school type, school enrollment size, proportion of special education students, and socioeconomics) and the percentage of students who are opted out of MCA testing?

Ho1. There are no significant relationships between school variables and the percentage of students who are opted out of the MCA tests.

Ha1. There are significant relationships between school variables and the percentage of students who are opted out of the MCA tests.

Research Question 2. Is there a significant relationship between school variables (i.e., grade level, academic subject, school type, school enrollment size, proportion of special education students, and socioeconomics) and the odds of schools meeting compliance with an opt out rate of less than 5%?

Ho2. There are no significant relationships between school variables and the odds of schools meeting compliance with an opt out rate of less than 5%.

Ha2. There are significant relationships between school variables and the odds of schools meeting compliance with an opt out rate of less than 5%.

Conclusions

Research Question 1 results revealed a significant relationship between MCA opt out data and the following school variables: School Type, Grade Level, percentage students receiving Special Education Services, and percentage Free and Reduced-Priced Meal eligible students. Lower Reading MCA opt out rates were found in Traditional Public Schools compared to Public Charter Schools and in schools with a larger percentage of Free and Reduced-Priced Meal eligible students. Whereas higher Reading MCA opt out rates were found in High Schools compared to Elementary Schools, schools with larger Enrollment Number, and in those with a higher percentage of students receiving Special Education Services. Math MCA opt outs were higher in High Schools compared to Elementary Schools, and in schools with a higher percentage of students receiving Special Education Services.

Research Question 2 analysis revealed similar results for both Reading and Math MCA testing compliance. Traditional Public Schools were less likely to be non-compliant with the federal testing requirement of 95% compared to Public Charter Schools. Furthermore, High Schools and schools with larger percentage of students receiving Special Education Services were less likely to be compliant with the 95% federal testing requirement. Reading MCA data analysis showed Traditional Public Schools are 3.03 times less likely of being out of compliance compared to Public Charter Schools and High Schools had a 490% increase in the odds of being out of compliance compared to Elementary Schools. Whereas Math MCA data analysis revealed

Traditional Public Schools are 2.38 times less likely of being out of compliance with the 95% testing requirement compared to Public Charter Schools. And, High Schools had a 705% increase in the odds of being out of compliance compared to Elementary Schools.

The results of this study support Bourdieu's cultural capital theory. Bourdieu believed that families rich in cultural capital possess information that perpetuate social and educational inequalities (Clayton et al., 2018). Enrollment in Public Charter Schools is an option available to all students yet it requires access to that information. Families rich in cultural capital would, in theory, not only have access to Public Charter School information, but also information regarding their rights in regard to MCA testing. Furthermore, Neill (2016) stated that low-income families lack resources and access to information, which supports the finding of lower MCA opt out rates in schools with higher percentage of Free and Reduced-Priced meal eligible students.

Implications for Practice

Opting out of state mandated testing, while not a new phenomenon, may have significant implications for federal testing requirements and accountability data for schools and states. The implications of this research are significant as they are the first step in understanding the variables associated with opting out of Minnesota's mandated assessment, the MCA. Identification of school variables significantly related to opting out will guide efforts to address future MCA test refusals.

Nationwide. One implication for practice is to understand the negative effects MCA opt outs have on accountability data at the federal level. Labeling opt outs as *not proficient* and including those scores in school accountability increase the odds of schools being out of compliance with the 95% federal testing mandate. Furthermore, categorizing opt outs as *not*

proficient misrepresents the overall academic proficiency of students in Minnesota. Not all states report results in the same way. For example, the results of Wisconsin's standardized exam are reported at the school level as the total number of students, the number tested, and the number not tested (Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, n.d.). The academic proficiency of students in Minnesota cannot be fairly compared to students in Wisconsin. Categorizing test refusals as *not tested* instead of *not proficient* would yield more accurate measures of academic proficiency at the state level. The effect of removing opt outs from the data to determine compliance was not part of this study; however, it may be worth investigating.

Minnesota. Standardized test data is necessary to measure and hold schools accountable for student learning (MDE, 2018c). Recording opt outs as *not proficient* inaccurately reflects academic proficiency at the school and district level. Test data is used by MDE to identify schools needing support yet with high opt out rates the accuracy of the identification could be questioned. Furthermore, realtors and families are potentially using inaccurate information to sell property and make school choices. MCA opt outs must be categorized in a way that does not misrepresent academic proficiency of students on a school or district level. MDE must account for MCA opt out data in an alternative way when identifying schools needing support.

Prior to this study, no research studies regarding Minnesota's test refusals could be found. This study filled a gap in research by identifying some of the variables related to opting out of the MCA. Public Charter Schools compared to Traditional Public Schools demonstrated higher opt out rates for the Reading MCA versus the Math MCA. High Schools, compared to Elementary Schools, were found to have higher opt out rates, for both the Reading and Math MCA. Even more significant was finding that, at the High School level compared to Elementary Schools, the odds of being out of compliance with the 95% federal testing requirement increase

by 490% in Reading and 705% in Math for a one unit increase in opt outs. The dramatic increase in the odds of being out of compliance point to the importance of proactively addressing test refusals at the High School level. Knowing more opt outs occur at the High School level and in Public Charter Schools allows for targeted campaigns to promote the importance of, and participation in, the MCA. MDE-designed activities should target all stakeholders and be communicated in a variety of ways such as: educational administration trainings, public forums, printed literature, and classroom conversations with students.

Furthermore, while suspecting opt out rates increase in schools with a higher percentage of students receiving Special Education Services, the results of this study confirm this as a fact in Minnesota. Students receiving Special Education Services, except those with a significant cognitive disability who are eligible to take the alternative assessment, are required to take their grade-level MCA rather than one more appropriate to their current academic level. A Grade 8 student functioning at a Grade 3 reading level must take the Grade 8 MCA knowing they will likely receive a *not proficient* score. The argument could be made that, in cases such as this, there is no difference between the student testing or opting out. However, valuable information about individual academic growth is missed when a student opts out of the MCA. Along with recategorizing test refusals as *not tested,* assigning a growth value or score rather than identifying a student as *not proficient* would provide stakeholders more useful information.

Equity. The Every Student Succeeds Act's (ESSA) goal was to improve academic outcomes for all students, especially those from lower-income families (U.S. Department of Education, 2019). Accurate assessment of student outcomes and progress toward closing the achievement gap is only possible if the measurement data is not flawed. For this reason, this study analyzed the relationship between socioeconomic variables and opt out data which leads to

another implication for practice. Of the socioeconomic variables analyzed, (percentage poverty level, percentage unemployed, median household income, percentage college completion, Rural-Urban Continuum Code, and percentage Free and Reduced-Priced Meal eligible students), only one revealed a statistically significant relationship to MCA opt out data; fewer opt outs occur in schools with a higher percentage of Free and Reduced-Priced Meal eligible students. This finding directly relates to the idea of cultural capital; families low in cultural capital, experiencing poverty, may lack access to opt out information. Or, they may feel bullied into taking the MCA fearing funds will be withheld (Neill, 2016). While fewer opt outs are preferable, this finding may point to a larger issue of equity to address. When communicating with families, schools must take extra steps to ensure that all families have access to the information. Extra steps should include sending communication more than once, in multiple ways, such as through the mail and email, and sending information in the language spoken in the home. MCA results should not be used to compare schools nor Minnesota's progress toward closing the achievement gap when considering equity.

Teacher and administrator evaluations. The use of student standardized test results to measure the effectiveness of teachers or administrators in a value-added system has the potential for bias if a large number of a subgroup opts out (Marland et al., 2020). Given the results of this study, MCA data should not be used to evaluate teachers or administrators at the High School level, in Public Charter Schools, in schools with larger enrollment sizes, and in schools with a large percentage of students receiving Special Education Services. Evaluation systems should not include the use of student MCA scores, because students who do not test are considered *not proficient*, instead, evidence of teacher and administrator effectiveness should be documented through observations, work samples, and classroom benchmark assessments.

These are several implications for practice as a result of this study. However, there are many more areas that require further study.

Recommendations for Future Research

This study examined school variables associated with MCA opt outs. A limited number of variables were analyzed, yet this study serves as a platform for additional research. Further study is required to explore significant relationships of other variables such as race, gender, and English Learner status, to MCA opt outs. Another area to investigate is the change in parent and student test refusals at different grade levels. Are High Schools more likely to be out of compliance with the 95% testing requirement because students are refusing the test more so than parents?

At the national level, research is needed to ensure state level data is being reported in a consistent way. Academic proficiency data submitted to the U.S. Department of Education by each state must accurately reflect student performance. If standardized test results are to be used to determine funding, it is imperative opt out data be weighed in the decision-making process. Further research is needed to evaluate how state opt out data is accounted for at the federal level.

Research is also needed to evaluate the implications of removing MCA opt outs from the Minnesota accountability data. Policymakers need to investigate the creation of a *not tested* category for opt outs. At the same time, policymakers need to research alternative methods of obtaining accurate academic proficiency information for all students, in lieu of MCA data.

Additional research exploring the reasons cited for opting out is also warranted. Parents and students who refuse the MCA are required to complete the MDE test refusal form (Appendix A) and cite the reason for the refusal. While MDE does not collect the test refusal form, schools are required to keep this on file. Understanding the specific reasons for refusing the MCA will

be another important step toward addressing the identified concerns. If test anxiety is identified as a reason for refusing the test, then MDE and school administrators can strategize ways to target that concern. For example, letting these students and families know that while they are free to opt out, there may be value in letting the student try to test, knowing that at any point they may stop. The ultimate goal would be to decrease student, and perhaps parent, anxiety by placing less emphasis on the end result, a test score, and more emphasis on the well-being of the student. Furthermore, it will be important to assess the understanding of the consequences of opting out. Do those who refuse or promote refusal of the MCA understand that while there are no consequences for the student the district receives a *not proficient* score? Are all stakeholders aware of the implications opting out has on accountability data?

Finally, the opt out movement in Minnesota and communication about opting out should be studied. In 2013, Jeanette Deutermann, a parent in Long Island, New York, chose to opt her son out of the mandated state test. Deutermann met with other parents of children in her son's Grade 4 class and each decided to opt out of testing that year (Hursh, Deutermann, Rudley, Chen, McGinnis, 2020). While word of opting-out was initially spread through personal interactions, Deutermann started a Facebook group, Long Island Opt Out (LIOO) which allowed her to reach a larger audience. Meanwhile, Lisa Rudley, a parent of a child on the autism spectrum and allergies to vaccinations, learned about the option to opt out of mandated testing by investigating the schools' stance on opting out of vaccinations (Hursh et al., 2020). In Syracuse, New York in July 2013, supporters of the opt out movement, including Deutermann and Rudley, met and organized their grassroots efforts to undermine the Common Core. Out of this group, the New York State Allies for Public Education (NYSAPE) was formed and a website was launched. While social media played a major role in organizing resistance to the Common Core and state

testing, leaders in the movement also spoke at forums in school districts across New York to gather more supporters. Other states were experiencing similar activities with the formation of organized online groups that serve as a go-to resource for those interesting in refusing state testing.

An online presence means organizations can reach people across the country. Fair Test, The National Center for Fair and Open Testing, Citizens for Public Schools, and United Opt Out National are just a few of the organizations that provide resources and guidance for those wanting to opt out of testing. In Minnesota, the Minnesota Advocates and Champions for Children advocates for signing a petition objecting to the Common Core, and encourages testing opt outs. However, this was the only Minnesota-specific resource that was found and current activity on the website is unclear.

Are test refusals in Minnesota influenced by national opt out organizations or other lesser-known groups? The role of organized groups and word-of-mouth communication in test refusals should be investigated. From whom do families learn about their right to refuse the MCA? Is the opt out option passed on from friends, relatives, or colleagues who have personal experience with refusing the test? When deciding to opt out, it will be important to discover if families complete the required test refusal form and document their reasons. While word-of-mouth may alert families to the opt out option, are they aware of the implications for schools?

Furthermore, it will be important to evaluate a schools' role in test refusals. Do families make the decision to opt out on their own or is the option presented to them by their school or a well-intentioned teacher? Are teachers and administrators aware of the implications opt outs have to school accountability data? Educational professionals must understand and present

accurate opt out information to families. Before the test refusal issue can be fully addressed it is necessary to know what variables are significantly related.

Concluding Comments

The results of this quantitative study revealed there are school variables significantly related to MCA opt outs. While there are many more variables and aspects of the opt out movement to investigate, the findings can provide direction for schools, administrators, and MDE in their efforts to promote participation in the MCA. Targeting opt out rates in Public Charter Schools, High Schools, and schools with a larger percentage of students receiving Special Education Services should be the primary focus. At the same time, MDE and state legislators should revisit the practice of labeling opt outs as *not proficient* in school data and consider categorizing them as *not tested*. Creating a new category, such as *not tested,* will provide schools, districts, and the state with accurate academic proficiency measures of students tested.

Teacher and educational administration preparation programs should devote instructional time to exploring the roles of state-mandated assessments, opt outs, and accountability data at the state and federal levels. While federal level information is consistent, states have control over the assessment given and how opt outs are addressed. Understanding the role of the MCA and the implications of test refusals on accountability data, should be a condition of educational licensure in Minnesota. Teacher and administrator license renewals should include continuing education clock hours in MCA testing and accountability. Schools using Professional Learning Communities should spend time collaborating about testing and accountability and strategizing ways to decrease test anxiety and promote participation. Finally, as part of the annually required

MCA test security training for teachers and administrators, additional information about opting out and accountability data should be covered.

This study analyzed variables associated with opt out data in Minnesota. Variables associated with opt out decisions in other states should be investigated as well, especially those with opt out rates that exceed the required 95% federal testing requirement. Test data must accurately reflect student achievement if it continues to be used to allocate funding and evaluate teachers, administrators, and schools. Test data must also be complete to correctly measure progress toward closing the achievement gap at the local, state, and federal levels. When schools and states are out of compliance with the federal testing requirement, incomplete data is being used for decision-making.

Regardless of how one feels about standardized assessments, state mandated testing for accountability purposes is likely here to stay. As word of opting out spreads in Minnesota, and the practice of labeling these as *not proficient* continues, the accuracy of accountability data will decrease. Continued monitoring of MCA opt out rates in future years will be essential to ensure the assessment data accurately reflect academic proficiency of students and schools in Minnesota.

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Appendix A: Parent/Guardian Guide and Refusal for Student Participation in Statewide Testing

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Parent/Guardian Guide and Refusal for Student Participation in Statewide Testing

This information will help parents/guardians make informed decisions that benefit their children, schools, and communities.

Why statewide testing?

Minnesota values its educational system and the professionalism of its educators. Minnesota educators created the academic standards which are rigorous and prepare our students for career and college.

The statewide assessments are how we as a state measure that curriculum and daily instruction in our schools are being aligned to the academics standards, ensuring all students are being provided an equitable education. Statewide assessment results are just one tool to monitor that we are providing our students with the education that will ensure a strong workforce and knowledgeable citizens.

Why does participation matter?

A statewide assessment is just one measure of your student's achievement, but your student's participation is important to understand how effectively the education at your student's school is aligned to the academic standards.

- In Minnesota's implementation of the federal Every Student Succeeds Act, a student not participating in the statewide assessments will not receive an individual score and for the purpose of school and district accountability calculations, including opportunities for support and recognition, will not be considered "proficient."
- Students who receive a college-ready score on the high school MCA are not required to take a remedial, noncredit course at a Minnesota State college or university in the corresponding subject area, potentially saving the student time and money.
- Educators and policy makers use information from assessments to make decisions about resources and support provided.
- Parents and the general public use assessment information to compare schools and make decisions about where to purchase a home or to enroll their children.
- School performance results that are publicly released and used by families and communities, are negatively impacted if students do not participate in assessments.
- English learners not taking ACCESS or Alternate ACCESS for ELLs will not receive a score to meet English learner program exiting criteria.

Academic Standards and Assessments

What are academic standards?

The Minnesota K–12 Academic Standards are the statewide expectations for student academic achievement. They identify the knowledge and skills that all students must achieve in a content area and are organized by grade level. School districts determine how students will meet the standards by developing courses and curriculum aligned to the academic standards.

What is the relationship between academic statewide assessments and the academic standards?

The statewide assessments in mathematics, reading, and science are used to measure whether students, and their school and district, are meeting the academic standards. Statewide assessments are one measure of how well students are doing on the content that is part of their daily instruction. It is also a measure of how well schools and districts are doing in aligning their curriculum and teaching the standards.

Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments (MCA) and Minnesota Test of Academic Skills (MTAS)	ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS for English Learners
• Based on the Minnesota Academic Standards; given annually in grades 3–8 and high school in reading and mathematics; given annually in grades 5, 8, and high school for science. • Majority of students take the MCA. • MTAS is an option for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.	• Based on the WIDA English Language Development Standards. • Given annually to English learners in grades K–12 in reading, writing, listening, and speaking. • Majority of English learners take ACCESS for ELLs. • Alternate ACCESS for ELLs is an option for English learners with the most significant cognitive disabilities.

Why are these assessments effective?

Minnesota believes that in order to effectively measure what students are learning, testing needs to be more than answering multiple choice questions.

- To answer questions, students may need to type in answers, drag and drop images and words, or manipulate a graph or information.
- The Reading and Mathematics MCA are adaptive, which means the answers a student provides determine the next questions the student will answer.
- The Science MCA incorporates simulations, which require students to perform experiments in order to answer questions.

All of these provide students the opportunity to apply critical thinking needed for success in college and careers and show what they know and can do.

Are there limits on local testing?

As stated in Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.301, for students in grades 1–6, the cumulative total amount of time spent taking locally adopted districtwide or schoolwide assessments must not exceed 10 hours per school year. For students in grades 7–12, the cumulative total amount of time spent taking locally adopted districtwide or schoolwide assessments must not exceed 11 hours per school year. These limits do not include statewide testing.

In an effort to encourage transparency, the statute also requires a district or charter school, before the first day of each school year, to publish on its website a comprehensive calendar of standardized tests to be administered in the district or charter school during that school year. The calendar must provide the rationale for administering each assessment and indicate whether the assessment is a local option or required by state or federal law.

What if I choose not to have my student participate?

Parents/guardians have a right to not have their student participate in state-required standardized assessments. Minnesota Statutes require the department to provide information about statewide assessments to parents/guardians and include a form to complete if they refuse to have their student participate. This form follows on the next page and includes an area to note the reason for the refusal to participate. Your student's district may require additional information.

A school or district may have additional consequences beyond those mentioned in this document for a student not participating in the state-required standardized assessments. There may also be consequences for not participating in assessments selected and administered at the local level. Please contact your school for more information regarding local decisions.

When do students take the assessments?

Each school sets their testing schedule within the state testing window. Contact your student's school for information on specific testing days.

- The MCA and MTAS testing window begins in March and ends in May.
- The ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS for ELLs testing window begins at the end of January and ends in March.

When do I receive my student's results?

Each summer, individual student reports are sent to school districts and are provided to families no later than fall conferences. The reports can be used to see your child's progress and help guide future instruction.

How much time is spent on testing?

Statewide assessments are taken one time each year; the majority of students test online. On average, the amount of time spent taking statewide assessments is **less than 1 percent of instructional time** in a school year. The assessments are not timed and students can continue working as long as they need.

Why does it seem like my student is taking more tests?

The statewide required tests are limited to those outlined in this document. Many districts make local decisions to administer additional tests that the state does not require. Contact your district for more information.

Where do I get more information?

Students and families can find out more on our Statewide Testing page (education.mn.gov > Students and Families > Programs and Initiatives > Statewide Testing).

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Minnesota Statutes, section 120B.31, subdivision 4a, requires the commissioner to create and publish a form for parents and guardians to complete if they refuse to have their student participate in state-required standardized assessments. Your student's district may require additional information. School districts must post this three-page form on the district website and include it in district student handbooks.

Parent/Guardian Refusal for Student Participation in Statewide Assessments

To opt out of statewide assessments, the parent/guardian must complete this form and return it to the student's school.

To best support school district planning, please submit this form to the student's school no later than January 15 of the academic school year. For students who enroll after a statewide testing window begins, please submit the form within two weeks of enrollment. A new refusal form is required ***each year*** *parents/guardians wish to opt the student out of statewide assessments.*

Date_____(This form is **only** applicable for the 20____to 20____school year.)

Student's Legal First Name_____ Student's Legal Middle Initial_____

Student's Legal Last Name_____ Student's Date of Birth_____

Student's District/School_____ Grade_____

Please initial to indicate you have received and reviewed information about statewide testing.

_____ I received information on statewide assessments and choose to opt my student out. MDE provides the *Parent/Guardian Guide and Refusal for Student Participation in Statewide Testing* on the MDE website (education.mn.gov > Students and Families > Programs and Initiatives > Statewide Testing).

Reason for refusal:

Please indicate the statewide assessment(s) you are opting the student out of this school year:

_____ MCA/MTAS Reading _____ MCA/MTAS Science

_____ MCA/MTAS Mathematics _____ ACCESS/Alternate ACCESS for ELLs

Contact your school or district for the form to opt out of local assessments.

I understand that by signing this form, my school and I may lose valuable information about how well my student is progressing academically. As a result, my student will not receive an individual score. Refusing to participate in statewide assessments may impact the school, district, and state's efforts to equitably distribute resources and support student learning; for the purpose of school and district accountability calculations, my student will not be considered "proficient."

If my student is in high school, I understand that by signing this form my student will not have an MCA score that could potentially save time and money by not having to take remedial, non-credit courses at a Minnesota State college or university.

Parent/Guardian Name (print) _____

Parent/Guardian Signature _____

To be completed by school or district staff only. Student ID or MARSS Number _____

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