

Homeschooling and Standardized Testing

According to Oregon Statute, a family who decides to homeschool must register with their local Education Service District in the academic year that the child turns 7 by September 1, or within 10 days of withdrawing the child from public or private school. At the time of registration, the parent may decide to announce a particular grade level for the child, from first grade up. If none is given by the parent, the child is assumed to be in the grade corresponding with his or her age on September 1, as if he or she has started first grade at age 6.

Age by September 1	Grade if starting 1 st grade at 6	Grade if starting 1 st grade at 7
6	1	K
7	2	1
8	3	2
9	4	3
10	5	4
11	6	5
12	7	6
13	8	7
14	9	8
15	10	9
16	11	10
17	12	11
18		12

Once you have designated a grade level for your child, the ESD expects that you will not change it unless there is a compelling reason to do so. However, keep in mind that if it appears you are changing grade levels simply to avoid testing, the ESD may choose to question your decision to change. You may choose curriculum at any grade level you like, regardless of the grade level your child is registered at.

When is testing required?

A child who is registered as a homeschooler is expected to do standardized testing by August 15 of the summer following the completion of 3rd, 5th, 8th, and 10th grades, as long as the child has been homeschooled since at least February of the year preceding testing (18 months before the test deadline).

So, if you start homeschooling your child in the 3rd grade, the first required test would be at the end of 5th grade.

You may also elect to have your child do testing in non-mandatory years.

What is tested, and who can administer the tests?

The required tests include grade-level math (concepts, application, skills), reading (comprehension), and language (writing, spelling/grammar, punctuation, etc.)

Tests must be administered by a state-approved tester who is not related to the child. The Oregon Department of Education has a list of approved testers, and there are a number of organizations in Oregon that offer testing for individuals or groups of homeschoolers. The cost to take the set of tests is usually about \$40 to \$50, paid directly to the tester. There are also testers who come directly to your home and customize the testing experience, and they might charge more.

How is the test scored and how are the scores reported?

Each test is scored on a percentile. This means that the score your child gets represents how many people also taking the same test got a lower score.

So, if 100 people took a test with 50 questions, and your child was the only one to get all 50 correct, he would have a score of 99th percentile. (99 percent of the test-takers scored below him.) At the same time, if he only got 20 correct, but that was more than anyone else got, he would still have a score of 99th percentile.

If your child got 49 questions correct, but everyone else got 50 correct, then he would have 0 percentile (no one scored below him), even though he clearly knew the material.

Ordinarily, the test scores are scattered over a much broader range, of course. In a typical test with 50 questions, a few children will get only a few answers right, and a few children will get most of them right, with the other children getting different amounts right.

It is important to know that percentile scores do not represent how well the child knows the material; only how well he performs relative to everyone else taking the test. When the scores are sent to you, you will also see the raw score: that is, the number of correct answers and what areas were answered incorrectly.

Each test is given a percentile score, and then there is a composite score, which is a single percentile representing your child's performance on all three subjects together.

When your child takes the test, the score is sent to a national scoring company, and the results are sent directly back to you. Not to the test administrator, not to any affiliated school, but just to you. You do not have to report the scores to anyone unless the ESD asks you for them. If you are asked to provide the test results, the only score you need to report is the composite percentile score. You may also be asked to verify that the test was conducted by an approved tester.

What if my child doesn't do well on the test?

If your child scores at the 15th percentile or above, then the ESD simply files the report and you are done until the next testing period. If your child scores below the 15th percentile, then he must test again in the following year. In the second year, if the percentile score is the same as or better than it was in the first year, again you are done until the next testing period. If the score has dropped, then the child is required to test again a third year. (This is usually the next scheduled testing period anyway.)

If the score has dropped again in the third year, then the ESD may schedule an appointment with you to determine whether homeschooling is the best option for the child, or if a Privately Developed Program

(PDP) would be a good idea. If you have concerns about your child's ability to perform at or near grade level, you may be interested in developing a PDP even before testing begins. A PDP may specify alternatives to testing, or no testing/evaluation at all.

If you think your child has not performed well on the test because of test anxiety, or illness, or discomfort with the testing situation, or for any other reason, you may choose to have him repeat the test. There is no limit to how many times a child can take a test, up through the August 15 deadline. (You would pay for the testing each time.)

How to prepare for testing

Many homeschoolers do not prepare in any special way for standardized testing. However, if a child has never done standardized testing before, it is usually a good idea to practice taking tests using "bubble" answer sheets. You can get "test prep" booklets at teaching supply stores such as Learning Tree or through online stores such as amazon.com. They are inexpensive, and contain a comprehensive selection of typical practice questions and practice tests at each grade level to familiarize a child with the subject matter and skill level of the test. They also provide practice in filling out the bubble answer sheets, and offer helpful suggestions to improve a child's comfort level and test performance.

The practice tests in the test prep booklets are sometimes even more extensive than what will be on the actual tests!

The basic battery of tests takes only a few hours. A child who has had sufficient rest and food before the test is usually in pretty good shape to take the test. If your child has special needs regarding hearing, attention, sensory processing, etc., you should speak with the test proctor ahead of time about reasonable accommodations.

Examples:

You register your 9-year-old as a 4th grade homeschooler in September 2013. At the end of that school year, in 2014, he is not required to test. The first time he is required to test is by August 15, 2015, after he has completed 5th grade.

In April of 2013, you take your 8-year-old out of public school, and register her as 2nd grade homeschooler. At the end of the school year in 2014 (3rd grade), she is not required to test, since she will only have been homeschooling for 16 months by August 15, 2014. The first time she will be required to test is by August 15, 2016, at the end of 5th grade.

You register your 7-year-old as a 2nd grade homeschooler in September 2013. He will be required to test at the end of 3rd grade in 2015.

You register your 7-year-old as a 1st grade homeschooler in September 2013. She will be required to test for the first time at the end of 3rd grade in 2016.

Oregon Revised Statutes

The full text of the position of the State of Oregon regarding homeschooling may be found at <http://www.leg.state.or.us/ors/339.html>, section 339.035.

Whether or not you choose to comply with the Oregon Statutes and register with ESD is a personal decision, as is your decision to comply with the testing requirements. However, you should be aware that there are two situations where it may be to your advantage to have registered and/or tested:

- The Department of Motor Vehicles requires an under-18 applicant for a Learner's Permit to demonstrate either enrollment in school, registration as a homeschooler, or completion of school.
- The Oregon Student Access Commission (<http://www.oregonstudentaid.gov/>) provides financial aid for college to Oregon students. To be eligible for aid from OSAC, a homeschooled student from Oregon, not yet enrolled in college, must submit all three of the following:
 - A copy of the Confirmation of Enrollment letter from your local Educational Service District (ESD).
 - A copy of the results of a tenth-grade standardized achievement test.
 - A transcript or equivalent from the homeschool teacher describing the coursework and letter grades assigned.

You can also find more information about homeschooling and standardized testing at <http://www.ohen.org/oregon/legal>.