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Recommended Citation

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New York State ELA Opt-Out Rates: Understanding the Impact of Race

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ABSTRACT

In 2009, 48 states established the Common Core Standards in response to the growing movement by state governors and corporate leaders who believed that high school exit expectations fall short of employer and college demands. Soon thereafter standardized assessments were developed that were geared to the more rigorous standards. In New York State (NYS), resistance slowly started arising shortly after the new assessments commenced in 2013. By 2016, nearly 22% of all third-to-eighth graders in NYS opted out of taking the ELA, making NYS one of the highest opt-out states in the nation.

Data from the New York State Education Department reveals a large ethnic disparity in opt-out rates. In 2016, the overall opt-out rate in NYS stood at 21.7%. This compares to a white opt-out rate of 51.4%, an African-American opt-out rate of 10%, a Hispanic opt-out rate of 16.0% and an Asian opt-out rate of 7.0%. What factors can explain this wide disparity? The results indicate that factors affecting the white opt-out rate include whether the county is situated within New York City, county median income and county political affiliation. Factors impacting the black opt-out rate is influenced by county “ruralness” and county median income.

Keywords

Economics of education, primary education, standardized testing, opt-out

1 INTRODUCTION

Over the last several years, the opt-out movement has garnered significant attention from the media, academics, and school administrators. This is particularly the case in New York State (NYS) where the opt-out rate more than quadrupled from 2014 to 2016, from 5% to 22%. This paper attempts to discern the factors that influence the opt-out rate by race (in particular African American vs. white) in NYS.

2 WHO OPTS OUT NATIONALLY?

National survey data reveals that the parents who opt out fit a general demographic, namely, parents who are white, highly educated, somewhat politically liberal and relatively affluent. Looking through the lens of racial/ethnic makeup, a 2015 Phi Delta Kappa (PDK) and Gallup survey reveals that 44% of white parents or guardians support opting out of the Common Core Assessment (CCA) versus a 28% support rate for parents who are, and have children of color. A 2015 study by the Brookings Institute reveals evidence that opt-out rates are dependent upon district demographics, and actual test scores (Chingos 2015).

The same survey showed that ethnic minority groups are supportive of standardized testing in general; 72% of black parents and 61% of Hispanic parents considered test scores either “very” or “somewhat” important for measuring the effectiveness of their community schools in contrast to 55% of white parents.

More recently, a 2016 national study conducted by Pizmony-Levy and Saraisky (PLS) surveyed those supporting the opt-out movement, showing 98% of respondents had a post-secondary education with a median income of \$125,000. Furthermore, the survey found that 51% of the respondents identified themselves as politically liberal versus 18% that identified as being politically conservative (14, 51). Interestingly, about 35% of the respondents resided in New York State. Looking at income statistics, a 2013 Associated Press/National Opinion Research Center (AP/NORC) survey showed 85% of parents earning less than \$50,000 a year said that regular assessment was “very” important or “extremely” important, in contrast to the 73% earning \$50,000–\$100,000 and the 63% earning over \$100,000 per annum (8). Significantly, more parents earning less than \$50,000 a year—79%—said that standardized tests measure the quality of education at a school “somewhat” well or “very” well, whereas only 66% of parents earning \$50,000–\$100,000 and 65% earning over \$100,000 had the same response.

As noted above, this PLS study revealed that 51% of the opt out supporter respondents identified themselves as politically liberal and 18% as politically conservative. There were significant differences regarding the reasons why liberals and conservatives supported opting out of the CCA. For liberals, the top reason cited for supporting opting out of the assessment was their opposition to using assessments in order to evaluate their children’s teachers; for conservatives, the top reason was opposition to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

Other reasons supporters of opting out of the CCA cite motives such as forcing educators to “teach to the test,” opposition to the “privatization of schools,” the growing role of corporations in schools (private testing corporations, e.g. Pearson’s, getting paid with public funds), and the fear of a superabundance of classroom time allocated for student test preparation (Goch 2007).

Looking specifically at NYS, NYSED 2016 data shows that students opting out were more likely to be non-white, in low-need or average-need districts, more likely to have scored at a low proficiency during the prior year’s exam, are less likely to be economically disadvantaged, less likely to be a student with a disability and much less likely to be an English Language Learner (Goch 2017).

3 GRADES 3-8 ENROLLMENT IN NYS BY RACE

As the pie chart below indicates, no single race comprise a majority of NYS’s 3-8 enrollment:

Figure 1

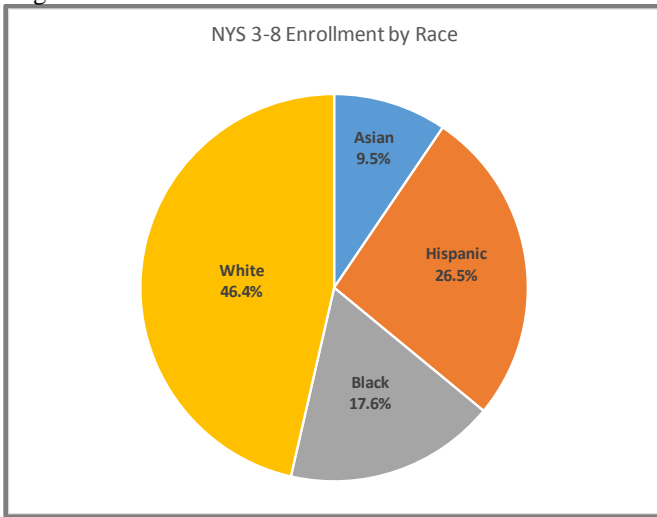
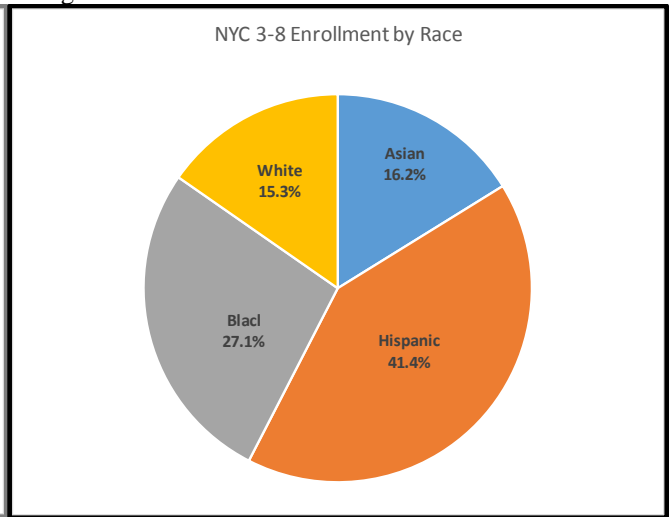


Figure 2



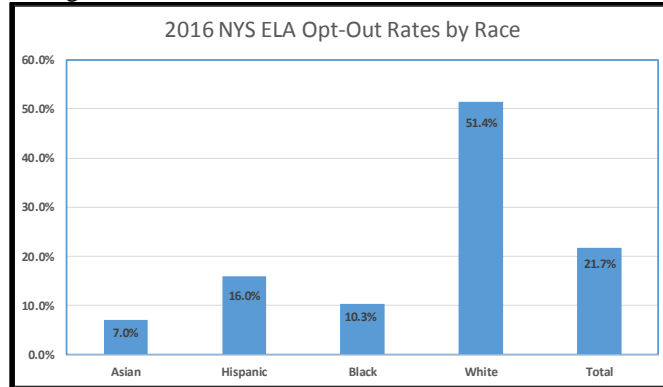
As can be seen in the above figures, the racial makeup in the 3-8 cohort in NYS is quite diverse as no single race constitutes majority and there is an even split between white and minority groups. However, if we strip out the five boroughs (counties) comprising New York City we see a different story. In NYC, ethnic minorities make up 85% of the students. White students only comprise 15.3% of enrollment in grades 3-8 vs. 46.4% state-wide. As this paper will discuss, minority students within grades 3-8 are much less likely to opt-out compared to white students.

4 RACIAL COMPOSITION OF OPT-OUTTERS IN NYS

Looking across all 61 of NYS counties, the data reveals a wide disparity. As national survey data indicates, counties that are predominantly suburban, white, and middle-to upper middle class have the highest opt-out rates. A case in point is Nassau County (77% white, median household income of \$100,000, median home value of \$450,000). In 2016 44.1% of third-to-eighth graders opted out of the ELA standardized test. Compare this to Bronx County (45% white, median household income of \$35,000, median home value of \$364,000) having an opt-out rate of 2.2%.

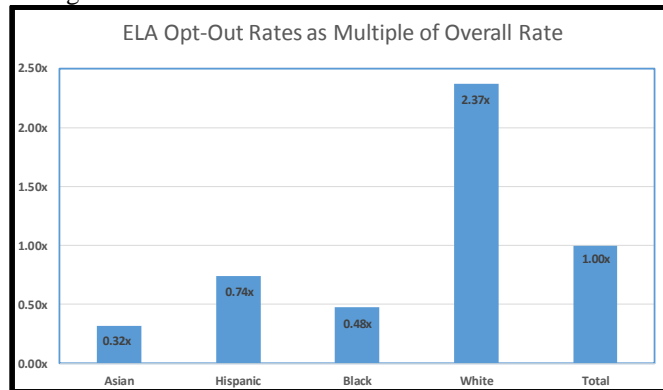
The bar graph below depicts the wide disparity in opt-out rates across races.

Figure 3



As can be seen in figure 3, the opt-out ranged from 7.0% (Asians) to more than 50% (white). The graph below the likelihood of opting out as compared to the overall opt-out rate.

Figure 4

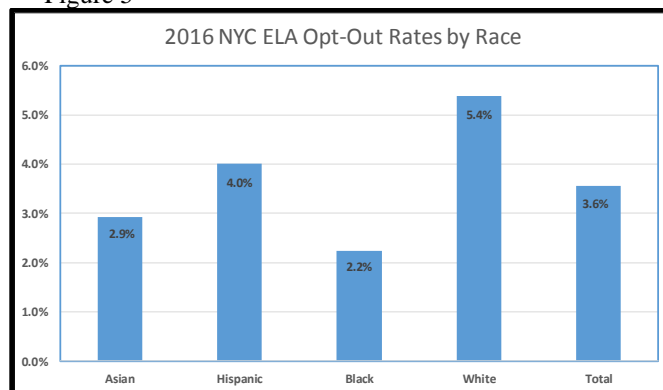


For examples, whites are nearly 2.5 times more like to opt-out as compared to the overall grades 3-8 cohort, while African Americans are only half as likely to opt out compared to the overall cohort.

4 A NOTE ON NYC

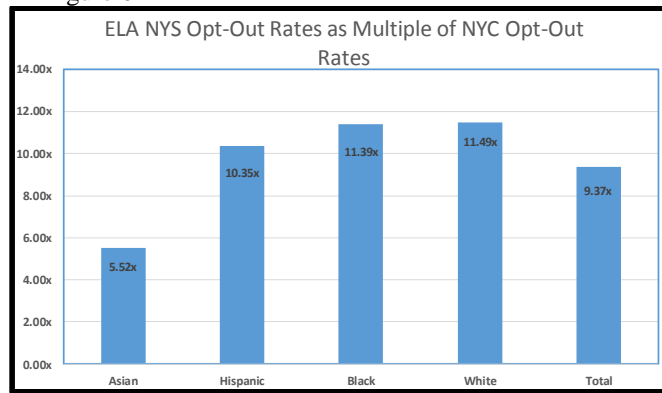
As noted above, the third-to-eighth grade enrollment demographics in NYC are markedly different from the rest of the state. For example, whites accounted for nearly half of the enrollment across NYS, while only making up 15% of the enrollment in the five counties of NYC. Since we have already seen that minorities opt-out at a significantly lower rate than whites, one would expect to see lower opt-out rates in NYC. The graph below illustrates this phenomenon

Figure 5



The graph below shows by composition of NYS opt-outters by race, expressed as a multiple of the NYC opt-out rates by race.

Figure 6



For example, a third-to-eighth grader in NYS is 9.4 times more likely to opt-out compared to, a third-to-eighth grader in NYC.

However, it should be noted that racial demographic profile is not the only factor, or perhaps not even the most important factor driving the disparity in opt-out rates. Unlike most of the counties in NYS, NYC’s are not completely “zoned.” Approximately 25% of NYC’s middle school and 35% of its high schools “screen” students for admission. Admission is based on grades, interviews, attendance, artistic talent, etc. However, one of the more important screening criteria is scores on NYS standardized test, both the ELA and math assessments.

4 IMPLICATIONS OF OPTING OUT

Supporters of the CAA believe it is imperative to gather student assessment/performance data at the “building” (individual school) and demographic level in order to allow stakeholders (parents, educators, policy makers, etc.) to understand the extent to which schools are effectively (or ineffectively) educating all children. On a policy level, many believe that only from standardized assessments can resources be targeted effectively and allocated to underachieving schools. This is why so many civil rights groups are vocal opt-in supporters (Goch, 2007).

6 DATA

Most data files were retrieved from the New York State Education Department (NYSED), specifically, NYSED’s grades 3-8 Assessment Data Base files (assessment scores), NYSED’s Report Card Data (demographic data) and NYSED’s District-Level Test Refusal files. These NYSED files contain building level data on assessment scores, demographics and opt-out rates. School level data was then aggregated to obtain district-level statistics. Political party affiliation data was retrieved from The NYS Board of Elections. Both median income and geographic data were derived from the U.S. Census.

7 METHODOLOGY

This research attempts to answer the following questions: 1. What factors affect a parents’ decision to opt out of the NYS’s ELA assessment? and 2. Do the same factors impact both white and black opt-out rates? Our analysis employs regression analysis to explore these issues. Eq. A shows the regression equation used to explain white opt-out rates (WOR). Eq. B shows the regression equation used to explain black opt-out rates (BOR).

$$\text{Eq. A. } \text{WOR} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{INC} + \beta_2\text{PAFF} + \beta_3\text{NYC} + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- WOR = White Opt-Out Rate
- INC = Median Family Income
- PAFF = Political Affiliation (percent voters Conservative and Republican parties+)
- NYC = A dummy variable denoting if the county is in NYC (=1) or outside NYC (=0)
- ε = Error term

$$\text{Eq. B. } \text{BOR} = \beta_0 + \beta_1\text{INC} + \beta_2\text{RURAL} + \varepsilon$$

Where:

- BOR = Black Opt-Out Rate
- INC = Median Family Income
- RURAL = Percent county residents living in rural areas
- ε = Error term

8 RESULTS/DISCUSSION

The findings reveal that white opt-out rates (WOR) in NYS are significantly positively impacted by median family income (higher median income results in higher white opt-out rates), political affiliation (the more conservative the county the lower the WOR and whether or not the county is located in NYC (NYC counties have lower WORs). Again, these results conform to national data survey revealing that higher income families are more likely to opt-out and that conservatives have a less favorable view towards opting out compared to liberals. The finding that those students residing within the five counties comprising NYC are less likely to opt-out evidences the fact that NYC middle and high school schools place a greater emphasis on standardized tests as compared with the other 56 NYS counties.

The tables below (7a. – 7c.) shows the summary of the WOR regression results:

Figure 7a.

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.688649896
R Square	0.474238679
Adjusted R Square	0.447044128
Standard Error	0.103862228
Observations	62

Figure 7b.

ANOVA					
	<i>df</i>	<i>SS</i>	<i>MS</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Significance F</i>
Regression	3	0.564353994	0.188118	17.43874	3.45058E-08
Residual	58	0.62566702	0.010787		
Total	61	1.190021014			

Fig. 7.c

Coefficients Results/Statistics								
	<i>Coefficient</i>	<i>Standard Error</i>	<i>t Stat</i>	<i>P-value</i>	<i>Lower 95%</i>	<i>Upper 95%</i>	<i>Lower 95.0%</i>	<i>Upper 95.0%</i>
Intercept	0.21	0.102549748	2.085274	0.041455	0.008568706	0.419119954	0.008568706	0.41912
INC	0	1.0565E-06	3.788347	0.000363	1.88757E-06	6.1172E-06	1.88757E-06	6.12E-06
PAFF	-0.4	0.166837888	-2.38485	0.020376	-0.731845458	-0.063920825	-0.731845458	-0.06392
NYC	-0.3	0.063795129	-5.42413	1.19E-06	-0.473732745	-0.218333095	-0.473732745	-0.21833

Regarding black opt-out rates (BOR), the findings show, as in explaining the WOR, that BOR are significantly positively impacted by median family income (higher median income results in higher WOR, However, political affiliation (percent conservative voters) does not show any statistical significance in explaining the BOR. It is thus suspected that this is due to the low variability in political affiliation of the black electorate as most African American. In addition, and as expected, the BOR is significantly and positively related to the percentage of county residents living in rural areas. This is most likely related to greater African American presence in non-rural counties.

The tables below (8a. – 8c.) shows the summary of the BOR regression results:

Figure 8a.

Regression Statistics	
Multiple R	0.533686
R Square	0.284821
Adjusted R Square	0.260578
Standard Error	0.105846
Observations	62

Figure 8b.

ANOVA					
	df	SS	MS	F	Significance F
Regression	2	0.263241816	0.131621	11.74842	5.07262E-05
Residual	59	0.660993672	0.011203		
Total	61	0.924235488			

Figure 8c.

Coefficients Results/Statistics								
	Coefficients	Standard Error	t Stat	P-value	Lower 95%	Upper 95%	Lower 95.0%	Upper 95.0%
Intercept	-0.083048432	0.085872128	-0.96712	0.337433	-0.254878163	0.088781299	-0.254878163	0.088781299
INC	3.0679E-06	1.20873E-06	2.538113	0.013805	6.49232E-07	5.48658E-06	6.49232E-07	5.48658E-06
RURAL	0.278730015	0.057514571	4.84625	9.51E-06	0.163643625	0.393816405	0.163643625	0.393816405

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