

Stoneman Douglas students could be excused from state testing

[Scott Travis](#)

Marjory [Stoneman Douglas High School](#) may get to retain its A grade for the eighth year in a row — without students having to take any standardized tests.

The [Florida Senate](#) has approved an amendment to its major education bill that would exempt the Parkland school, which was the site of a [Feb. 14 mass shooting](#) that killed 17, from having to take the Florida Standards Assessment or other state-required standardized tests this school year.

The school would retain its [grade from last year](#), which was an A.

Legislators say Stoneman Douglas students missed too many days to be properly assessed. The exemption would also allow students “to have as much of a normal last few months of school as possible,” said state Sen. Kevin Rader, D-Delray Beach. The proposal still needs to be approved by the House and signed by Gov. Rick Scott.

It’s a proposal the Broward County School District wanted, but not necessarily in the way it’s being packaged. The [Senate](#) has made it part of a massive [education reform bill](#) that includes several controversial provisions, including offering private school vouchers for students who report being bullied and decertifying teachers unions where membership drops below 50 percent.

"We can only propose legislation. We can't pick where it goes," said John Sullivan, a lobbyist for Broward schools. "We clearly support the measure. That doesn't mean we support the bill in its entirety."

The district asked for the exemption because "we want to make sure we're doing everything we can to help the healing process, so it's appropriate to remove some of the stress that comes with statewide assessments," Sullivan said.

Stoneman Douglas is consistently one of the top performing high schools in Broward County. It has received an A or B grade every year since 2001 and an A every year since 2011.

Students missed eight days in February after the shooting and have had shorter days since they returned to class Feb. 28. Students will start attending full days again on Wednesday.

Rader said even after students returned to school, the initial focus should be on their mental health, not academics.

"They were getting back to this place where the last time they left, they were running for their lives," Rader said.

The missed days at Stoneman Douglas were in addition to the seven days all district students missed during Hurricane Irma in September. The district made up the equivalent of one hurricane day by extending two half days to full days.

"We were already behind because of the hurricane, and it's just not plausible for them to take standardized tests," Stoneman Douglas parent Ricci Nelson said. "All you're going to do is stress these kids

out, and they don't need that right now."

The proposal also would exempt the school from having to meet the minimum number hours that state law requires students be in session each year.

High schools are scheduled to give standardized tests between April 16 to May 18, according to a [district testing calendar](#).

The testing exemption is one of two proposals in the Legislature that would specifically benefit Stoneman Douglas. The two houses support proposals to [demolish and rebuild](#) the three-story classroom building where the shooting happened as well as build a memorial. The House has proposed \$28.6 million for the building and the Senate has proposed \$25.2 million. Both houses proposed \$1 million for the memorial.

The Legislature is also considering numerous general [school security measures](#) that were prompted by the shooting, including paying for more campus police officers and mental health services, raising the age of buying a rifle to 21 and allowing districts to arm teachers and other staff.

stravis@sun-sentinel.com, [561-243-6637](tel:561-243-6637) or Twitter @smtravis.