



## Frequently Asked Questions 2016-17 State Assessments

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## General Questions

### **1. Why do we need state assessments?**

- Our state tests serve multiple objectives:
  - They provide feedback about students' academic progress and how it aligns with grade-level expectations, providing parents and teachers a big-picture perspective about how a student is progressing compared to peers across the district and state, including a student's strengths and growth opportunities.
  - This builds confidence and transparency about students' readiness for college and the workforce among Tennessee universities and employers and holds us accountable to serving all students fairly.
  - Assessments help educators strengthen instruction and reflect on their practice, and allow us to highlight schools where students are excelling, so we can learn from those who are doing well.
  - State assessments also help inform decisions at the state level and help state and district leaders determine how to allocate resources, better invest in schools, and identify where we may need to offer additional support.

### **2. What grades and subjects will have state assessments during the 2016-17 school year?**

- Grades 3–8:
  - Students in grades 3–8 will take assessments in math, English language arts (ELA), and science.
  - There will not be an operational test in social studies for grades 3–8 in 2016-17. Rather, social studies will be **field tested** in grades 3–8 this year.
  - Students in grade 3–8 with the most significant cognitive disabilities (about one percent of the student population) will take the MSAA for ELA and math and the TCAP Alternative assessment for social studies and science.
  - Some middle school students will take End of Course (EOC) exams if they are enrolled in high school courses (see below).
- High school:
  - High school students will take state assessments for courses with End of Course exams (EOCs):
    - English I/II/III
    - Algebra I/Geometry/Algebra II or Integrated Math I/II/III
    - U.S. history
    - Chemistry
    - Biology
  - Students in grade 10 with the most significant cognitive disabilities (about one percent of the student population) will take the TCAP Alternative assessment for science. Similarly, students in grade 11 with the most significant cognitive disabilities (about one percent of the student population) will take the MSAA for ELA and math.

### **3. When will state assessments take place?**

- All assessments will be administered toward the end of the year (or at the end of the semester for high school students on block schedule). We are eliminating the Part I and Part II structure.
- State assessments will be administered during a three-week window between April 17 and May 5. The first subpart of the ELA assessment, which includes the writing prompt, will be administered during the first week of the three-week window.
- For high school fall block, there will also be an assessment window from November 28 through December 16.
- The assessments for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, MSAA (math and ELA) and TCAP Alternative (science and social studies), will take place over a two month window in the spring.

### **4. How will assessments be structured in the 2016-17 school year?**

- While all subjects will be administered in one testing window at the end of the school year, each subject, with the exception of biology and chemistry, will be delivered in multiple subparts or sessions. This structure will allow for greater scheduling flexibility within the testing window.
  - ELA: 4 subparts
  - Math: 3 subparts
  - Science (grades 3–8): 2 subparts
  - Biology and chemistry: 1 subpart
  - U.S. history: 3 subparts
  - Social studies field test: 1-2 subparts
- Additionally, some students will participate in ELA and/or U.S. history field tests outside the operational testing window. The ELA field test will include one subpart featuring a writing prompt; the U.S. history field test will also include one subpart featuring a writing prompt. One-third to one-half of students will need to participate in this field test, and the group of students selected to participate will rotate each year.
- For students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, testing is highly individualized to meet the needs of the student. For example, the test window is two months, and the teacher will determine how to break up the test into smaller sections during those two months to best suit each individual student.

### **5. How much time will students spend taking state assessments this year? How does this compare with the amount of time scheduled for state assessments last year?**

- The total time reductions vary by grade. Please see the complete testing times chart [here](#).
- In grades 3–8, students will have tests that are 200-210 minutes shorter.
  - As an example, for a typical third grader, the 2016-17 TCAP end of year assessments will be shorter by 210 minutes—or three hours and 30 minutes—compared to last year.

- In high school, most individual End of Course assessments have been shortened by 40-120 minutes.
  - For a typical eleventh grader, this would mean the 2016-17 TCAP End of Course assessments will be shorter in total by 225 minutes—or three hours and 45 minutes—compared to last year.
- *Some* students will participate in ELA and/or U.S. history field tests outside the operational testing window. The ELA field test will include one subpart featuring a writing prompt; the U.S. history field test will also include one subpart featuring a writing prompt. Only one-third to one-half of students will need to participate in these field tests.
- For students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, testing time will greatly vary, depending on student needs.

**6. *Will the test be online this year?***

- Tennessee will phase in online administration over multiple years to ensure both state and local technology readiness.
- For the upcoming school year, the state assessment for grades 3–8 will be administered via paper and pencil.
- The department will work closely with Questar to provide an online option for high school End of Course exams for math, ELA, and U.S. history if the testing platform demonstrates early proof of successful online administration in schools. Additional information for districts is forthcoming.
- Even if schools demonstrate readiness for online administration, districts will still have the option to choose paper and pencil assessments for their high school students.
- Biology and chemistry exams will be administered via paper and pencil.
- For students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, MSAA has an online and paper options, and the TCAP Alternative assessment is paper and pencil only.

**7. *When will we receive scores?***

- High school quick score reports will be available in early January for fall block and by the end of the school year for spring block and traditional schedules. Individual student reports will be mailed in early summer.
- Since it is the first year the department will be able to score math and ELA assessments, score reports will not be available for grades 3–8 until fall 2017. In future years, grade 3-8 score reports will be released over the summer, similar to when high school reports will be released in 2017.

**8. *What resources are available to help me prepare my students?***

- Revised assessment blueprints will be shared by the end of July.
- Updated practice tests will be available on EdTools in August. These are largely the same materials that were available last year but will be adjusted to reflect the updated structure of tests.

- These practice tests will be available in an online practice platform in by early November.
- The online item sampler tool will not be available until 2017-18, and the department looks forward to providing more details as timelines are finalized with the vendor.
- Strong instruction every day is the best preparation for students. Revised assessment blueprints can help you plan your instruction and be released by the end of July. Current academic standards are available [here](#).
- Teachers of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities can continue to utilize [NCSCpartners.org](http://NCSCpartners.org) or the [NCSC wiki](#) for MSAA preparation. Practice tests for both MSAA and TCAP Alternative will be available in February.

**9. How will students' performance factor into my evaluation this year?**

- Student performance will factor into evaluation as outlined in the Tennessee Teaching Evaluation Enhancement Act with caveats based on new legislation after suspension of testing in grades 3–8 during the 2015-16 school year.
  - 2015-16 TNReady data will only be included in a teacher's evaluation score if it benefits the teachers score. Otherwise, 2015-16 data will not be included.

**10. What accommodations are available for students?**

- The full range of accommodations will be available to make the test accessible for all students to participate.
- IEP teams will be provided guidance on how to select appropriate accommodations for this year. The accommodation options will be similar to last year.

**11. What assessments are required for English Learners (ELs)?**

- ELs are required to participate in any state or federal mandated assessments, including achievement assessments.
- The only exception is for a student who is in his or her first year in a U.S. school. A first-year EL may be exempt from the English language arts, social studies, and U.S. history assessments. However, the first-year EL must take the math assessment but may have the score exempt from accountability.
  - *Note:* This is a one-time exemption only, regardless of a student going in and out of the country multiple times.
- Testing accommodations apply for ELs who are in direct service, waived services, or considered transition during the four years following exit from the ESL program.

**12. What is the English language proficiency assessment for English Learners (ELs)?**

- This assessment is not a part of TCAP because its purpose is to determine proficiency levels for ELs and allows the districts to properly place ELs into the English as a Second Language program for the district.
  - Federal policy requires under Title I that all English Learners be assessed for English language proficiency.

- Our English language proficiency assessment is the WIDA ACCESS 2.0 assessment, which is a computer-based assessment for ELs in all grades except kindergarten.
- Kindergarten ELs also take an assessment called WIDA ACCESS, which is built around a board game.
- All WIDA assessments cover all four domains: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
- This assessment is given to ELs in the spring.

### **13. Who is the vendor for the 2016-17 assessments?**

- On July 14, the department executed a contract with **Questar**, a national leader in large-scale assessment, to **develop, administer, score, and report** the majority of our state assessments for the 2016-17 school year. Please refer to our [FAQ](#) for more detailed information about our new assessment vendor and how we selected them.
  - Questar will develop, administer, score and report End of Course and end of year TCAP assessments for math and ELA.
  - Questar will also administer, score, and report the science and social studies assessments.
    - Educational Testing Service (ETS) develops End of Course and end of year assessments for science and social studies, as well as the alternative assessments for 3-11 science and science and social studies.
  - Questar will develop, administer, score, and report of the optional second grade assessment.
- The vendor for MSAA, the math and ELA assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities, is Measured Progress.

### **14. I know the department is focused on raising ACT scores. When my students apply to college, their ACT score matters. Why don't we use ACT for all of our state assessments?**

- We agree that the ACT is an important factor for college admissions which is why an ambitious goal to raise the average ACT score to a 21 by the year 2020 is a focus of our strategic plan, *Tennessee Succeeds*. But there are several reasons why the ACT and/or the ACT suite of assessments is not appropriate for our state test.
  - *The ACT is a high-level overview.* It's important to remember that the ACT exam offers a snapshot of a student's entire academic career, usually in 11th or 12th grade. The ACT does not measure the depth of learning for each individual course.
  - *Parents and teachers need to know students' progress along the way.* End of year and End of Course assessments are important to ensure students are making progress each year and are on track for each step along the path to college and career readiness, so we can identify strengths and opportunities for growth well before a student takes the ACT, enters the college classroom,

or starts a new job. The earlier we can identify an area of needed support -- or capitalize on an area where a student is especially strong -- the better chance we have at ensuring each child can grow into his or her fullest potential.

- *College readiness is about more than just one test.* ACT is one factor of the admissions process, but it's also important to make sure students are prepared for the demands of college once they enroll and that they receive a well-rounded, rigorous education throughout their K-12 journey, which is one of the accountability roles of state assessments. Additionally, the rigor of our End of Course assessments in high school can help students prepare for the realities of their college experience.
- *We need a Tennessee-tailored test.* ACT does offer an additional suite of assessments known as ACT Aspire, but these tests are only available in math, ELA, and science, and they don't measure the depth of our Tennessee standards. We need an assessment that can be tailored to align to our academic standards in Tennessee, especially as they continue to be reviewed in the future.

#### **15. How will teachers be involved in the assessment process?**

- Tennessee teachers will be involved in writing test items for the 2016-17 school year and beyond. There will be an item writer workshop in October and another in the spring. These workshops will train teachers to write items that will eventually be on the field test and operational tests.
- Tennessee teachers will continue to be involved in the item review, bias and sensitivity review, accessibility review, and rangefinding processes as they have been to date. Also, both educators and community members participate in the standards setting process.
  - **Item review:** Tennessee educators review items for alignment to academic standards and grade level appropriateness. During these reviews Tennessee educators can accept, reject, or make suggestions for revisions to an item.
  - **Bias and sensitivity review:** Tennessee educators review items for bias and sensitivity issues. These educators ensure items are bias free and represent the values of Tennesseans. During these reviews Tennessee educators can accept, reject, or make suggestions for revisions to an item.
  - **Accessibility review:** Tennessee educators review item format to ensure the accessibility of the item for all students. This group closely reviews for accessibility for students with disabilities.
  - **Rangefinding:** Tennessee educators score a sampling of Tennessee student essays in English language arts and social studies in order to set the anchor papers that determine the cut off for each trait at each level. The anchor papers selected by Tennessee educators are in turn used to train graders and continue recalibrating graders throughout the scoring process.



- **Standards setting:** Tennessee stakeholders including parents, educators, and community members will review actual test items and recommend the cut scores for each performance level descriptor (formerly below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced) for the assessments.

**16. Do students in grades K-2 take any state assessments?**

- Students in kindergarten and first grade do not take traditional, standardized state assessments.
- The department will offer a new Tennessee-specific optional second-grade assessment. This criterion-referenced assessment is being created in partnership with Tennessee teachers and measures student learning of the Tennessee State Standards for math and ELA.
- The test will be operational this year in spring 2017, and districts choose to participate. The test will be administered via paper and pencil.
- The department will provide additional information regarding practice materials and other opportunities to engage in the development of the second grade assessment.
- There is an Alternative Second Grade Assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities.
  - The department's special populations division is developing guidance for IEP teams on determining eligibility for the second grade alternative assessment.

## English Language Arts

**17. How will the ELA test be structured?**

- Students in grades 3-11 will take the ELA test in four subparts. The first subpart will ask students to respond to a text-dependent writing prompt. The other subparts will include multiple item types. All subparts will be administered near the end of the school year.
- Click [here](#) for the testing times chart.

**18. How many writing prompts will my students complete?**

- Students will respond to one writing prompt.

**19. What mode of writing will be tested on the prompt?**

- The prompt could be in any of the three modes of writing (explanatory, argument, or narrative).

**20. How much time will my students have to complete the writing prompt?**

- Students in grades 3-5 will have 75 minutes to respond to the writing prompt in session one of the ELA assessment.
- Students in grades 6-11 will have 85 minutes to respond to the writing prompt in session one of the ELA assessment.

- High school students taking U.S. history will have 50 minutes to respond to the writing prompt in session one of the U.S. history assessment.
- The times to administer the writing prompts are longer than other test subparts so that students will have adequate time to read passages critically and craft a thoughtful essay.

**21. Will subpart one of ELA feature any multiple choice questions along with the writing prompt?**

- Not this year, but we will move to this structure in the future. We believe that multiple-choice questions before the writing prompt will encourage students to closely read the text.
- We are unable to include multiple-choice items in the writing portions of the assessments this year because we can't alter the format of the prompts that we already field tested. However, we will include this new question format in the writing prompts that are field tested this year.

**22. How will writing be scored?**

- The scoring process starts with rangefinding.
- During rangefinding Tennessee educators use the Tennessee writing rubrics to set the cuts at every score level on each trait. The papers used to set the cut scores for each trait are known as anchor papers and are used to train content experts in the scoring process.
- Student responses will then be scored by these scorers using the anchor papers and the Tennessee writing rubrics that have been used previously.

**23. Will there be an ELA writing field test this year?**

- Yes, based on educator feedback, some students will participate in an ELA field test.
- There will be an ELA field test on a writing prompt that will be administered in one subpart separately from the operational test window.
- One-third to one-half of students will need to participate in this field test, and the group of students selected to participate will rotate each year.

**24. What is the ELA assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities?**

- Students in grades 3–8 and grade 11 will take the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) for ELA.
- MSAA will be administered during a two-month window in the spring.
- The test is highly individualized to meet the needs of each student.

## Math

### **25. How will the math test be structured?**

- All math tests will be administered in three subparts during a single testing window.

### **26. How much time will my students have to complete the test?**

- Testing time is slightly different based on subject and grade level. Please review the testing time chart [here](#).

### **27. Will my students be able to use a calculator?**

- Students will not be allowed to use calculators during the first math subpart. Students will be allowed to use calculators for the second and third math subparts.
- We will provide updated reference sheets and calculator guidance along with the assessment blueprints by the end of July.

### **28. What is the math assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities?**

- Students in grades 3–8 and grade 11 will take the Multi-State Alternate Assessment (MSAA) for math.
- MSAA will be administered during a two-month window in the spring.
- The test is highly individualized to meet the needs of each student.

## Science

### **29. How will the science test be structured?**

- Science standards, test structure, and item types will be the same as in recent years.
- Students in grades 3–8 will take the science test in two subparts.
- High school students in biology and chemistry will take the test in one subpart.

### **30. How much time will my students have to complete the test?**

- Testing time is slightly different based on subject and grade level. Please review the testing time chart [here](#).

### **31. Will high schoolers have the option to take science online?**

- No.

### **32. What is the science assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities?**

- Students in grades 3–8 and grade 10 will take the TCAP Alternative (TCAP-Alt) assessment for science.
- TCAP-Alt will be administered during a two-month window in the spring.
- The test is highly individualized to meet the needs of each student.

## Social Studies

### **33. How will the social studies test be structured?**

- There will not be an operational social studies test for students in grades 3–8 this year. Rather, students will participate in a social studies field test; additional information is forthcoming from the department.
- The U.S. history test will be administered in three subparts. The first subpart will include a writing prompt that asks students draw on content knowledge, as well as information in a reading passage provided with the prompt.
- The U.S. history writing rubric is the same rubric that was used last year.

### **34. How much time will my students have to complete the test?**

- High schools students taking U.S. history will have 50 minutes to complete subpart one, which includes the short essay response. They will have 45 minutes to complete subpart two and 45 minutes to complete subpart three. See the testing time chart [here](#).
- Students in grades 3–8 will take a social studies field test. Testing times for the field test will be approximately 50 minutes. This field test will be administered during the same window as the operational assessments at the end of the school year.

### **35. Why isn't there an operational social studies test for students in grades 3–8?**

- Because we suspended testing in grades 3–8 last year, we were not able to administer field test items in social studies for the 2016-17 school year. We are unable to use the items from last year's test due to the requirement that the test include 70 percent new questions. Also, we cannot rely on items from other item banks due to the uniqueness of Tennessee's social studies standards versus those of other states.

### **36. What is the social studies assessment for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities?**

- Students in grades 3–8 will take the TCAP Alternative (TCAP-Alt) assessment for social studies.
- TCAP-Alt will be administered during a two-month window in the spring.
- The test is highly individualized to meet the needs of each student.