

Ann Whalen
Senior Advisor to the Secretary, Delegated the Duties of the Assistant Secretary
Office of Elementary and Secondary Education
U.S. Department of Education
400 Maryland Ave. SW
Washington, D.C. 20202

Dear Delegated Assistant Secretary Whalen,

The purpose of this letter is to request a waiver on behalf of the Tennessee Department of Education from certain provisions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) due to the suspension of our annual State assessment program in grades 3-8 for the 2015-16 academic year. The State's decision to suspend testing in these grades was due to insurmountable challenges in delivering a new, online statewide assessment. The challenges resulted from the failure of our assessment vendor, Measurement Inc. (MI), to perform its responsibilities as defined in our contract for the delivery of a valid, reliable assessment program. Though we were able to complete assessments in grades 9-12, we were unable to fully deliver the assessments for grades 3-8 – meaning students in grades 3-8 were able to complete Part One of the statewide assessment, but not Part Two. As such, we are requesting a waiver from the following sections of ESEA:

- ESEA section 1111(b)(3)(A), which requires the State to implement a set of high-quality, yearly student academic assessments that include, at a minimum, academic assessments in mathematics, reading or language arts, and science that will be used as the primary means of determining the yearly performance of the State and of each local educational agency and school in the State in enabling all children to meet the State's challenging student academic achievement standards.
- ESEA section 1111(b)(3)(C)(xii), which requires the provision of individual student interpretive, descriptive, and diagnostic reports that include information regarding achievement on State assessments to parents, teachers, and principals as soon as is practically possible after an assessment is given.
- ESEA section 1111(b)(3)(C)(ix)(I), which requires the State to assess all students.
- ESEA section 1111(b)(3)(C)(xv), which requires the State enable itemized score analyses to be produced and reported, consistent with clause (iii), to local educational agencies and schools, so that parents, teachers, principals, and administrators can interpret and address the specific academic needs of students as indicated by the students' achievement on assessment items.
- ESEA sections 1111(h)(1)(C)(i) and 1111(h)(2)(B), which require an SEA and an LEA, respectively, to report information, in the aggregate, on student achievement at each proficiency level on the State's academic assessments and disaggregated and by race, ethnicity, gender, disability status, migrant status, English proficiency, and status as economically disadvantaged.

Tennessee believes annual assessments play a critical role in ensuring that all students are making strong academic progress. As Tennessee's teachers help to equip all students with the knowledge and skills they need, we have to ensure that we can identify any major gaps in students' learning and find variations in growth among different schools – both so we can strengthen support in places that need it and learn from educators and students who are excelling. Annual assessments are the best way to see how all students in Tennessee are doing, and it is one key measure through which we learn if we are meeting our responsibility to prepare all students for college and jobs. For all these reasons, we were extremely disappointed about our inability to complete the assessment program, and we are committed to ensuring that we will successfully administer our annual tests in future years.

In this waiver request, we will outline the steps we took throughout the 2015-16 school year to work with the assessment vendor and with our schools to reach our goal of successful online test administration for all students. We will provide details regarding the nature of the technical failure and evidence to support our conclusions. In addition, we will explain the extenuating circumstances and the State's extraordinary efforts to deliver the assessments. Finally, we will discuss our plan for implementing high-quality assessments in 2016-17 and beyond.

Preparing for 2015-16 Assessments

As a State, we took a number of steps over the course of the 2015-16 school year to ensure our schools' success, proactively avoid issues, and quickly troubleshoot problems. We worked through every possible solution before ultimately determining suspending State assessments in grades 3-8 would be the best option for our students.

First, we planned to strengthen the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) through introducing new, better assessments in math and English language arts (ELA), which were called TNReady. These two tests complement our annual TCAP State assessments in science and social studies. In addition, we planned to administer the math, ELA, and social studies assessment online in 2015-16 over the course of two parts. State law required the department to issue a request for proposals, and through competitive bidding, determine the vendor to help develop and administer high-quality assessments aligned to State standards. Based on the highest technical score and lowest cost, the State awarded MI the contract. MI was charged with providing a State test on an online platform and a paper-pencil backup option.

Online Platform Troubleshooting

Throughout the course of the fall of 2015, the State took proactive steps to ensure MI's online platform, called MIST, was able to operate at scale and that our schools were technologically ready. For example, the State requested all schools with students in grades 3-11 help test the capacity of the online platform on Oct. 1. This capacity test was designed to assess the network and server capacity and provide a check of schools' internet, hardware, and logistical readiness. Ultimately, it identified several issues including server capacity issues. Consequently, the State provided guidance to MI, which led them to make significant investments in server capacity and redesign infrastructure.

More than 1.4 million practice tests were taken on the online platform in October. At the end of the calendar year, students in 99 LEAs who were on fall block schedules – meaning the course lasted only one semester – successfully took 171,000 TNReady and TCAP End of Course assessments online. This evidence gave the State some confidence in both LEAs’ and the vendor’s collective commitment to the transition to a more rigorous and aligned assessment in an online environment.

In January 2016, the State again proactively led statewide troubleshooting to continue to build server capacity in anticipation of the larger number of test-takers during February, or Part One, testing. It requested schools complete follow-up stress tests on the online platform on Jan. 12 and 22, and the State followed up with on-site analysis to determine where any issues may exist: either with the school’s system infrastructure, the online cloud, or with MI’s data system and the MIST platform. The State’s technology team visited select LEAs across Tennessee to reproduce system errors in a real-world, real-time situation to provide better diagnostic information that would ultimately improve the experience for all LEAs. The State worked through a number of issues to strengthen the online experience before Part One of the two-part assessment began on Feb. 8.

However, given continued challenges with students encountering unacceptable user experiences on iPads and out of an abundance of caution, on Jan. 22 the State recommended that schools using iPads consider utilizing other available devices – or request a paper form – to administer Part One and/or Part Two of TCAP and TNReady. This advisement impacted less than 3 percent of students statewide, based on the reports of districts using iPads, though there were a handful of schools and districts who had a significant number of iPads deployed.

The State continued to proactively try to address its concern and LEAs’ anxiety through a communication on Feb. 2 that the State sent to all directors of schools to remind them that our collective goal was to ensure that our students have a successful testing experience. Given that goal, and given that the State was aware that some districts continued to experience unforeseen challenges with the MIST software, such as freezing and delays, the State offered all LEAs the option to choose whether to test online or on paper – whichever medium would best ensure their students had a positive testing experience where they could show what they know. The State gave LEAs technology readiness guidance to help them determine if their schools would be ready, along with a letter LEAs could share with their parents to explain the transition to paper, if they chose to switch, and bolster parent support of annual assessment.

Moreover, the State continued to engage MI regarding identified issues. The State’s Chief Information Officer, the Assistant Commissioner of Data & Research, and I held a conference call with the vendor on Friday, Feb. 5, to discuss final details regarding fixes applied in advance of the window opening on Feb. 8. The vendor committed to proactive communication regarding any technical glitches and vigilant monitoring of all their systems to minimize any risks.

Unfortunately, despite all these efforts, on Feb. 8, the first day of online administration of TNReady Part One was unsuccessful. At 8:25 a.m. CST, MI experienced a severe network outage, causing significant problems with the MIST platform. Shortly after learning about the

issue from districts (not the vendor), the State advised that schools experiencing problems with the test discontinue testing and return to their normal classes. The new nature of the issue highlighted the uncertainty around the stability of MIST and MI's ability to consistently provide a reliable testing experience for every student. In the best interest of our students and to protect instructional time, we could not continue with MI's online testing platform.

Further Details about the Technology Failure

The technical failure was widespread. Given the outage, it became clear the State was not going to be able to receive valid, reliable, or useful data from students via the online platform.

There are three core components to the online platform. Two of those – local LEA network, which includes infrastructure, and the online cloud, which includes broadband and connectivity – were within the State's ability to check and control. When the platform failed on Feb. 8, the State immediately verified the problem was not at the LEA or cloud level, which meant it could have only been with the vendor's data system. Additionally, third party technical evaluations eliminated both internet connectivity and district infrastructure as a cause of the failure, so it is reasonable to conclude that the technical failures can be attributed to the vendor's data center or software provided by the vendor.

Furthermore, the fact that problem was with the vendor's data system is not one that MI refutes. They have acknowledged privately with the State as well as publicly the issue was with their system, and it was not within State or LEA control.

Finally, in the contract with MI, the State purchased delivery of the service, not the purchase of technology. MI's failure – by [MI President Henry Scherich's own admission in statements to the media](#) – to provide this service was not something the State could control nor should it have been expected to. MI believed it was acceptable for the platform to only perform for some students, at some times, on some devices. The State believed in order to ensure a successful, positive testing experience for every student, the online platform needed to be consistently reliable.

Transition to a Paper Test and Troubleshooting Shipping Issues

Instead of testing online, the State immediately worked with MI on the paper-pencil backup option that had been written into the original contract. On the afternoon of Feb. 8, the State announced to all LEAs that we would move forward with TNReady on paper and pencil for both Part One and Part Two, that we were delaying and extending the testing windows as a result of the shift to paper, and we thanked LEAs for their flexibility and dedication to successful testing. The State also emailed Tennessee educators and wrote an open letter to parents, which it also shared with LEAs, to explain the transition and reaffirm the value of statewide assessment and the information parents and educators receive from this feedback loop. In addition, on Feb. 17, Tennessee Gov. Bill Haslam offered educators additional flexibility for their evaluation this year, providing them the option to only include 2015-16 data if it benefited their overall score.

While the State had delayed the start date of Part One to accommodate printing and shipping assessments, MI failed to deliver assessments to all districts as promised on this revised timeline. The State continued to send updates to LEAs, but ultimately, some districts did not receive their

materials until mid-March, despite MI's assurance all LEAs would receive tests by March 4. This greatly disrupted school schedules, including spring break, which impacted educators, students, and their families. To help mitigate the impact, the State again went out into the field to help districts administer the test, including unpacking, distributing, re-packing, and processing paper assessments for schools.

To proactively ensure there would be no shipping issues for Part Two, the State worked with MI to get a better commitment and exact schedule for printing and shipping assessments to LEAs. However, over the course of April, MI shifted their deadline three times. MI originally told the State all materials would ship to districts by Friday, April 15, for delivery one week prior to testing, which began on April 25. The company then told the State the "worst case scenario" for delivery of all tests was Friday, April 22. However, then they pushed this timeline back to Wednesday, April 27, calling it a new "worst case scenario." The State immediately and repeatedly requested specific delivery dates for LEAs, which MI said it was unable and unwilling to provide.

As the State attempted to problem-solve delivery delays with MI, the vendor conveyed that a shipping limit was delaying their progress, so the State worked directly with Tennessee-based FedEx to get it removed. Then, the State narrowed the scope of shipping by asking MI to prioritize the delivery of math and ELA tests, as those were the subjects required by federal law, while annual science and social studies assessments were mandated by the State. However, despite narrowing the scope, MI was still unable and unwilling to assure the State that they would guarantee their deadline of April 27.

On the morning of April 27, 100 percent of districts were still waiting on some grade 3-8 materials to arrive, and few districts had complete sets of tests for any grade or subject. MI provided only limited and vague information about the estimated delivery times for the remaining grade 3-8 materials. In total, 2 million documents had not been shipped, and based on the quantity in MI's daily shipments, if the State continued to wait, we did not believe districts would receive all of their materials until well into May, which would potentially delay the closing of the school year.

Communication with ED and Suspension of Testing in Grades 3-8

The week of April 18, as it began to appear that MI would miss the April 22 critical deadline, I reached out to Delegated Assistant Secretary Ann Whalen to inform her of the State's dire situation regarding TCAP and TNReady administration. In that conversation, I reiterated the State's commitment to annual assessments, outlined the proactive steps the State had taken, and explained that there was nothing more the State could do to ensure the vendor would deliver the assessment materials per the contract. I also shared that I wanted to ensure that the State is following federal law to the best of its ability and committed to continuing to work with the U.S. Department of Education to make a good faith effort to administer the test to all Tennessee students.

On April 22, when MI missed its "worst case scenario" shipping deadline, the State sent a note to LEAs stating that there would be no requests for districts to reschedule their testing window

beyond this final April 27 deadline that MI established as the new worst case scenario. The State also conveyed that our priority was for students to end the school year on a strong note, and that the department would not allow testing delays to interfere with our students' end-of-year experience. Moreover, the communication asserted that the State did not want district or school officials, educators, students, or parents to endure any further and unnecessary anxiety because of the uncertainty surrounding the assessment.

During the week of April 25, the State leadership team determined that districts had exceeded their responsibility and obligation to wait for grade 3-8 materials, and the State would not ask districts to continue waiting on a vendor that had repeatedly failed. I called Delegated Assistant Secretary Whalen to share the decision, and on the evening of April 26, the State sent over draft materials to the U.S. Department of Education to show how it would frame the decision to terminate the contract with MI and suspend testing for grades 3-8. This framing included the State's reiterating the value of annual State assessments and explaining that high school testing would continue, given that LEAs had materials for those assessments.

The press materials also stated that LEAs had the option to go forward with any 3-8 tests for which they had all the materials, as those along with all Part One tests would be scored to provide some raw score data for informational purposes. On the afternoon of April 27, the State announced that it was suspending testing for students in grades 3-8 via a press conference and conversations with stakeholders, and it followed up again with letters to parents and educators.

Ensuring All Students Take the State Assessment

In February 2016, the State released a memo as requested by key stakeholders, including LEAs, State legislators, and parents, which stated in part: "Because of the importance of annual assessment, we believe it is crucial for all students to take all TNReady and TCAP tests each year. State and federal law also requires student participation in state assessments. In fact, these statutes specifically reference the expectation that all students enrolled in public schools in Tennessee will complete annual assessments. Given both the importance and legal obligation, our state's policy is that parents may not refuse or opt a child out of participating in state assessments." (Attachment 1) Generally speaking, there was not a widespread opt-out movement in Tennessee. Instead, many stakeholders, including parents, shared our disappointment that TNReady tests would not be administered.

When issues arose where superintendents sought to "cancel" high school assessments, the State immediately addressed those, including through memos to all superintendents and high school principals and administrators to re-affirm that all high school students were expected to take the State assessment and again outlining the value. (Attachment 2) I also directly responded to parents, students, and school board members who felt continuing high school testing was "unfair," because of the suspension of testing in grades 3-8.

Ultimately, high school testing was successfully completed across Tennessee. The department again engaged directly with districts to locate and distribute materials for any subjects where there was a shortage of materials. State employees coordinated shipments and personally delivered assessment materials to districts and schools as needed. The State even arranged for

intra-district transfers of materials for districts that wanted to complete assessments in grades 3-8 but did not have materials shipped. Throughout all of these challenges, LEAs maintained their commitment to complete State assessments.

Current Status of Assessment in 2015-16 School Year

As noted earlier, the State was able to administer assessments in grades 9-12 during two administration windows for both fall and spring courses. The TCAP suite of assessments includes End of Course exams in 11 content areas, exceeding the minimum requirements set by ESEA for high schools. TCAP includes assessments for ELA and math for grades 9, 10, and 11, as well as science exams in biology and chemistry and a social studies assessment in U.S. history.

After the massive technical failure of the vendor's online assessment program on Feb. 8, 2016, the State completed assessments in high school via paper and pencil forms. Therefore, the State plans to complete all scoring and reporting for high school assessments. The State also plans to provide data on proficiency rates for State and local report cards and individual student reports for grades 9-12.

For grades 3-8, the only assessment windows were in the spring. The State was able to complete Part One of the assessment for grades 3-8 in ELA and math. Part One was comprised of writing items and open response items. However, the vendor was unable to deliver paper and pencil tests for Part Two of the assessment. Therefore, the State will not be able make proficiency determinations, issue individual student reports, or report achievement results on State and local report cards.

A new interim vendor – Pearson Inc. – was secured in May 2016 to complete processing, scoring, and reporting for all completed assessments. So, participation rates will be determined using the data from Part One and Part Two administration for high school. For grades 3-8, the State will be able to calculate participation rates using Part One data only and plans to provide raw score information to districts and schools for informational purposes.

High-Quality Plan for 2016-17

The State learned a great deal from the 2015-16 testing experience and put those lessons into action through the expedited selection of a new vendor for 2016-17 and decisions around test administration.

During the vendor selection process, the State surveyed industry leaders in large-scale assessments, vetting vendors that have successfully developed and administered large-scale assessments across the country. After researching multiple vendors, the State determined that Questar has a proven track record of excellence in statewide testing, administering large-scale assessments via paper and online and developing a high-quality test quickly, which makes it particularly well suited for Tennessee at this crucial time. This past school year, Questar administered the New York grade 3–8 assessments to more than 1.3 million students. In 2015, Questar also developed the Mississippi annual assessment on a timeline similar to Tennessee's. Questar currently develops and administers large-scale annual assessments for other states,

including Indiana, Missouri, Mississippi, and New York. Questar has partnered with Indiana on End of Course exams for 14 years and with Missouri for five years. They also were recently awarded the contract to administer Tennessee’s optional second grade assessment.

On July 7, the State announced it intended to award the 2016-17 contract to Questar, and the contract was finalized on July 14. In addition, Commissioner McQueen announced that Tennessee will phase in online administration over multiple years to ensure State, district, and vendor technology readiness. For the upcoming school year, the State assessment for grades 3–8 will be administered via paper and pencil. However, the State will work closely with Questar to provide an online option for high school End of Course exams if both schools and the testing platform demonstrate early proof of successful online administration. Within the contract, the State has stipulated a series of proof points that the vendor and LEAs must show in order to be considered ready. 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.

In addition to securing a new vendor, the State also made a number of structural changes to the the TNReady assessments to ease concerns about over-testing and test anxiety among students, educators and parents. Specifically, the test will now be given in one window at the end of the school year and the overall test time has been reduced by about a third. The test forms have also been divided into subparts that can often be completed during the course of a normal school schedule. The complete high-quality plan to deliver State assessments in 2016-17 and related materials are included in attachments 3-8.

Finally, I have engaged in extensive outreach with LEAs and stakeholders, particularly over the course of the summer, to reset the conversation about assessments and the State test. This outreach has included in-person meetings with superintendents and educators across the State, phone calls with key advocates and stakeholders, communications toolkits for LEAs, interviews with reporters, and extensive social media engagement, including a series of blog posts and graphics from me about the value of assessment. (Attachment 9) These changes have garnered positive press attention, including [public statements of praise](#) from LEA leaders.

We believe this memo outlines the extraordinary efforts the State took to administer the 2015-16 State assessments; the dedication the State has made to providing parents, students, and educators with as much data as possible from the 2015-16 to ultimately benefit all students’ long-term growth; and the concrete plans the State has made to ensure State assessments will be successful in 2016-17. Thank you for your consideration of our ESEA waiver request. If you have any questions, please direct those to the Assistant Commissioner for Data and Research, Dr. Nakia Towns, at Nakia.Towns@tn.gov.

Sincerely,



Dr. Candice McQueen
Tennessee Commissioner of Education

Attachment 1



Memo: Opting Out of Annual Assessments

Annual assessments are critical to ensure that all students are making strong academic progress.

In Tennessee, we look to see how students, schools, and districts are performing through the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), which includes TNReady for math and English language arts as well as assessments in social studies and science. These tests are aligned with our state's academic standards, which are the basic outline of what students are expected to know and from which educators design their lessons and curriculum. As Tennessee's teachers work to equip all students with the knowledge and skills they need, we have to ensure that we can identify any major gaps in students' learning and find variations in growth among different schools – both so we can strengthen support in places that need it and learn from educators and students who are excelling.

Results from TCAP tests give both teachers and parents a unique feedback loop and big-picture perspective to better understand how students are progressing and how they can support their academic development. This yearly academic check-up is the best way to see how all students in Tennessee are doing, and it is *one* key measure through which we learn if we are meeting our responsibility to prepare all students for college and the workforce. Because of the importance of annual assessment, we believe it is crucial for all students to take all TCAP tests each year, including TNReady in math and English language arts. State and federal law also requires student participation in state assessments. In fact, these statutes specifically reference the expectation that all students enrolled in public schools in Tennessee will complete annual assessments.

Given both the importance and legal obligation, parents may not refuse or opt a child out of participating in state assessments. Except for situations where the Tennessee General Assembly has specifically provided the right to opt out in the law, such as the family life curriculum, parents and/or students may not opt out of state-mandated content or instructional programs, including assessments. Similarly, there is no provision in federal law directly authorizing parents and/or students to opt out of mandated assessments.

Therefore, school districts are not authorized to adopt policies allowing these actions. If a school offers alternate activities for students whose parents refuse to have them participate in state assessments, they would in effect be allowing them to opt out. School districts should address student absences on testing days in the same manner as they would address a student's failure to participate in any other mandatory activity at school (e.g. final exams) by applying the district's or school's attendance policies.

We believe that any assessment should provide helpful information and be a worthwhile use of classroom time. TNReady, our new test in math and English language arts, will provide us with better insight on how our students are progressing on the standards we have been teaching in our classrooms. It is more challenging than the old assessment since it is fully aligned to expectations in Tennessee's higher standards. This test is also better than the old one: it looks for the skills that students need today, like critical thinking, true understanding, and

problem-solving abilities, not just basic memorization. While parents and teachers have told us that these are the skills they want our children to have in order to be successful, lifelong learners, we know that far too often students leave high school unprepared for the next step. Our most recent data show that 60 percent of high school graduates take remedial courses in their first year of college.

We also believe there should be a balance in testing, and we strongly support protecting classroom instruction. That is why we are seeking to eliminate redundant tests, following the recommendations of the [Assessment Task Force](#). We also will continue to improve the assessments we give and do our part to maximize instructional time. In addition, we will ensure that we make TNReady as transparent as possible by publishing questions and providing student answers. We have also taken steps to provide educators with greater flexibility on the use of TNReady in their evaluation, including proposing the option to exclude this year's TNReady data if it is not beneficial as we move through this transition. Districts also have complete discretion in how they choose to factor test data into employment decisions like promotion, retention, termination, and compensation.

It is fundamental to the future of Tennessee to ensure that every single student is on the path to success in college, careers, and life. As a state, we have a responsibility to equip all of our students to pursue their dreams, and we look forward to continuing to collaborate with Tennessee's educators and families to achieve that goal.

Attachment 2



May 2, 2016

High School Administrators (*and those giving End Of Course exams to seventh and eighth graders*):

Last week, the department announced that grades 3–8 annual testing would be suspended as a result of significant challenges delivering these tests to schools. **High school tests, on the other hand, will move forward as planned.**

Several districts are already finished with high school testing, but I wanted to reach out to all of you specifically to clarify why high school testing continues and what we gain from this individually and collectively. Your leadership and messaging matters to our students as they enter any testing season. You set the tone and expectations in your schools, and your partnership in communicating TNReady information with students is critical. They will follow your lead.

I also want to share additional context about why we suspended testing for grades 3–8 because our goal was certainly for *all* of our students to take TNReady and TCAP tests this year. The challenge started with our test vendor's inability to deliver the test successfully online. Per the contract, the vendor then moved to a paper test administration. We had hoped the vendor would learn from challenges with delivery for Part I and that Part II would be able to have a smoother administration without delays, but while the vendor delivered the high school tests, it only delivered about 50 percent of the 3–8 tests by the “worst case scenario” deadline set, which the vendor had already pushed back twice and put moved to within the testing window.

After much consideration, we cancelled 3-8 testing and terminated the vendor contract to avoid the continued disruption to end-of-year scheduling for grades 3-8 as they awaited testing materials with no specificity about arrival. **The cancellation of grade 3-8 testing *does not* impact high school since essentially all materials had already arrived in districts.** Materials for seventh and eighth graders taking the EOCs also arrived in districts, and as well as materials for the K-2 assessment for districts that choose to administer it.

While the information we get from these tests this year will provide individual students with important postsecondary readiness information, it also gives educators, districts, and the state a big picture view of where we are in relation to the expectations set by the standards we have now taught for the past four years. This feedback helps us know where we need to provide additional support, training, and resources at both the local and state levels—for next year and beyond. **Due to extended evaluation and accountability flexibility for this year's test, we can also receive this kind of feedback on student progress without any unintended negative impact on teacher evaluation or school or district accountability.** It is actually an ideal time to learn and grow as we transition in year one. This year's EOC information paired with other data points—like graduation rate, early postsecondary course work results, ACT or SAT results, attendance/chronic absenteeism issues, and feedback on student surveys at the end of our tests—will help us to continue to improve.

Having good data depends on a high-quality scoring process, and **I want to reassure you that we are actively ensuring that high school tests will be scored reliably and with fidelity to the standards.** We are in the process of securing another vendor to score the tests on the timeline that was originally communicated. Trained scorers will use the same anchor papers already selected by Tennessee teachers and the rangefinding process already completed by Tennessee teachers. All scorers meet set qualifications, go through a rigorous selection process, and are trained for inter-rater reliability and comparability. Just like we announced at the beginning of the school year, this year's scores will be on new score reports with better information for students, parents, and educators in the first year of a new test.

I hope you will take this opportunity to encourage your students to give their all and help them see that even amid setbacks, there are still opportunities to learn and grow. We have a new test that we can learn from this year. The feedback will be helpful to our students and to our larger understanding of continuous improvement in our schools, districts, and the state.

The best moments of my first year as commissioner have been when I have visited schools across the Tennessee and had the opportunity to interact with you and your students. They have shared their college and career aspirations, their thoughts on teachers, the best parts of their school day, and work they are doing every day. I also vividly remember many of the comments, questions, and concerns shared directly by them on several student-led visits this year. Their feedback and experiences actually encouraged me to begin a statewide task force, called Career Forward, with a goal of better matching our work in schools and our policies and actions at the state level to supporting students' future careers.

This summer will be focused on important work around Tennessee's vision and how it connects to assessment and accountability. We begin with the Assessment Task Force 2.0, regional director meetings on accountability and assessment, and town hall meetings across the state to help build our new Every Student Succeeds Acts plan for 2017. **We are also planning specific feedback opportunities for principals, in particular.** I look forward to hearing your voices, gathering your feedback and ideas, and working with you to ensure sure we are incentivizing the right work in schools.

In closing, I am reminded of a popular saying: *"I try to take one day at a time, but sometimes several days attack me at once."* I imagine this reflects how you must be feeling. You have done all you have been asked to do and more. I can't thank you enough. I appreciate your hard work and your partnership to end this school year with a collective message of hope that we can grow and learn in all situations we find ourselves.

Best,
Candice

Attachment 3

2015-16 Assessment Scoring & Reporting Timeline

Key Milestones	Detailed Timeline	Parties Responsible	Implementation Obstacles
Fall Administration dates for HS EOC	Part I – Nov. 2-20, 2015 Part II – Nov. 30 – Dec. 18, 2015	LEAs Assessment Logistics	Minor technical glitches. 160,000 tests completed online.
Rangefinding for fall part I handscoring	November 30 – December 4, 2015	TN Educators Content/Assessment Design Assessment Logistics Measurement Inc.	None.
Part I testing window for grades 3-8 and HS EOC	Feb. 8, 2016 (online only) Feb. 22 – Mar. 18, 2016 (paper only)	LEAs Assessment Logistics	Technical failure. Delayed timelines for printing and shipping.
Rangefinding for spring part I handscoring	April 4-8, 2016	TN Educators Content/Assessment Design Assessment Logistics Measurement Inc.	None.
Part II testing window, grades 3-8 and HS EOC (paper only)	April 25-May 10	LEAs Assessment Logistics	Delayed timeline for printing and shipping led to suspension of grade 3-8 testing.
Termination of contract with Measurement, Inc.	April 27, 2016	Commissioner General Counsel Procurement Office	All activities with vendor ceased. Need to immediately secure new vendor for scoring and processing.
Secure contract with Pearson for scoring and reporting	May 5, 2016	Commissioner General Counsel Procurement Office Pearson	Had to be secured via state “emergency contract” provisions.
Scanning, processing, and scoring of spring 2016 tests.	June – July 2016	Pearson Assessment Logistics	Challenges with collecting materials from MI and getting Pearson up to speed on items.
Standards setting for HS EOC	August 2016	Pearson Assessment Logistics Content/Assessment Design TN Educators and Stakeholders	None at this time. Standards setting for on August 22-26 for high school math, ELA, and U.S. History.
HS EOC reporting, individual student reports	October 2016	Pearson Assessment Logistics	None at this time.
Grade 3-8 Raw Data Reports	October 2016	Pearson Assessment Logistics	None at this time.
Public reporting (state report card)	November 2016	Assessment Logistics Data Management & Reporting	None at this time.

2016-17 Assessment Plan

Key Milestones	Detailed Timeline	Parties Responsible	Status
Secure new Assessment Vendor	July 2016	Commissioner Assistant Commissioner General Counsel Procurement Office	Questar awarded contract on July 14, 2016.
Finalize test blueprint and design.	July 2016	Questar Executive Director, Content Design TNReady Director	Test blueprints finalized and posted to website July 20, 2016. http://www.tn.gov/education/topic/tcap-blueprints
Secure content via third-party item banks	August 2016	Questar Executive Director, Content Design TNReady Director	Currently reviewing multiple state banks and Questar-owned items. Finalize by August 9.
Distribute practice test materials	August 2016	Questar Content Design Assessment Logistics	Currently updating forms from 2015-16. Expect release to LEAs August 17, 2016.
Complete technology pilot for high schools.	September 2016	Questar Chief Information Officer LEAs	Tracking toward last week of September with a target date of September 29.
Complete form development for fall administration.	September 2016	Questar Content Design	Pending
Assessment Ordering and student Pre-ID for fall administration.	October 2016	Questar Assessment Logistics LEAs	Online ordering will open August for completion by October 15, 2016.
Rangefinding for fall 2016 ELA administration.	October 2016	Questar Content Design Assessment Logistics TN Educators	Pending
Item Writing Workshop for 2017-18 administration.	October 2016	Questar Content Design TN Educators	Pending
Online practice test available	November 2016	Questar Chief Information Officer LEAs	Currently completing scope requirements in anticipation pilot results.

Key Milestones	Detailed Timeline	Parties Responsible	Status
Fall Testing window for HS EOC (paper test)	November 28 – December 16, 2017	Questar LEAs Assessment Logistics	Tests delivered to districts by November 14, 2016. Attachments: (6) 2016-17 Assessment Calendar (7) Assessment Admin Guidance (8) Fact Sheet on TCAP (9) 2016-17 Assessment FAQ
Quickscores reported for fall 2016 assessments.	January 2017	Questar Assessment Logistics	Pending
Assessment ordering and student Pre-ID for spring administration.	February 2017	Questar Assessment Logistics LEAs	Pending
Field test for ELA writing prompts.	March 2017	Questar Assessment Logistics LEAs	Pending. See Attachment (10) Field Test Plan.
Rangefinding for spring 2017 ELA administration.	February 2017	Questar Content Design Assessment Logistics TN Educators	Pending
Spring Testing window for grades 3-8 (paper) and HS EOC (online optional)	April 17-May 5, 2017	LEAs Assessment Logistics	Tests delivered to LEAs by April 3, 2017. See Attachments 6-9.
Quickscores reported for spring 2017 assessments.	May 2017	Questar Assessment Logistics	Pending
High School EOC Reporting (individual score reports)	July 2017	Questar Assessment Logistics	Pending
Standard Setting – Grades 3-8	July 2017	Questar Assessment Logistics Content/Assessment Design TN Educator & Stakeholders	Pending
Grade 3-8 Reporting	October 2017	Questar Assessment Logistics	Pending
Public Reporting (state report card)	November 2017	Assessment Logistics Data Management & Reporting	Pending

Assessment Calendar for 2016-17 School Year

Assessment Name	Administration	2016-17 Administration Window
Required Assessments		
TCAP End of Course	Fall Block	November 28–December 16
	Spring Block/ Spring Traditional	April 17–May 5
TCAP Grades 3–8 (The social studies field test will also be administered during this window.)	Spring	April 17–May 5
TCAP-Alt* Grades 3–11 (MSAA & Sci/SS)	Spring	March 6–May 12
ACT (Grade 11)	Spring	March 21 April 19 (make-up)
TCAP ELA Grades 3–8 Writing Field Test**	Spring	March–TBD
TCAP EOC U.S. History/Geography Written Response Field Test**	Spring	March–TBD
NAEP	Winter/Spring	January 30–March 10
Optional Assessments		
Grade 2***	Spring	April 24–May 5
Grade 2 Field Test (with 3 rd graders)	Fall	September 19–23
Grade 2-Alt Field Test (with 3 rd graders)	Fall	October 24–October 28
TCAP-Alt for social studies/science (Grades 3–8), Biology Field Test	Fall	October 17–November 4
ACT Senior Retake (Grade 12)****	Fall	October 22
PISA/TIMSS	Fall	TBD

* TCAP-Alt includes alternative assessments available to students with disabilities for whom participation in the regular state assessment is inappropriate, even with the use of extensive accommodations. Approximately one percent of the student population will participate in alternative assessments.

** Approximately, one-half to one-third of schools and districts will be required to participate in these field tests on a rotating basis every two to three years.

*** Participation in Grade 2 operational assessment is a district option.

**** Participation is limited to seniors who took the ACT as a junior.



Assessment Administration 2016-17 Overview and Guidance

Operational Testing Window

- Please see the full administration calendar ([here](#)). The following is a snapshot of important dates:
 - For high school students on block schedule, the fall testing window is **Nov. 28–Dec. 16**.
 - For students on traditional schedule or block schedule, the spring testing window is **April 17–May 5**.
- All operational tests will be completed in a single administration window, as opposed to a two-part testing window at different times during the school year.

Operational Test Scheduling

- **Subpart 1 of the English language arts and U.S. history assessments, which include writing responses, must be administered in the first week of the administration window.** Districts may select any day or days within the week to complete subpart 1. *However, all materials must be shipped back to the vendor no later than **Friday** of the first week of the administration window.*
 - For high school fall block End of Course (EOC) administration, the first week of the test administration window is Nov. 28–Dec. 2, 2016.
 - For all grades (3–8 and high school, traditional and block schedule), the first week of the spring assessment window is April 17–21, 2017.
- **For the remaining assessments**, districts must complete test administration over no more than 10 school days, and those days do not have to be consecutive.
 - Districts do *not* have to use all 10 days and may complete administration over fewer days.
 - Districts can choose to administer each subpart on different days to allow schools to maintain the regular bell schedule for most tests.
- Testing schedules should be established *by the district* at the school and/or district level. It is the district's option to allow schools to set their own testing schedules, independent of a district schedule.
- Please see details on subparts for each subject and grade level ([here](#)).
 - **English Language Arts (grades 3–11):** Subparts 2, 3, and 4 may be completed over as many as three days.
 - Please reference the first bullet point in the “Operational Test Scheduling” section for information about subpart 1 of the ELA assessment.
 - **Mathematics (Grades 3–11):** Subparts 1, 2, and 3 may be completed over as many as three days.
 - Subpart 1 is the calculator-prohibited section.
 - Schedules should provide a break between Subpart 1 and Subpart 2 to allow for the distribution of calculators, if completing those subparts back-to-back on the same day.
 - **Science (Grades 3–8):** Subparts 1 and 2 may be completed over as many as two days.
 - **U.S. History/Geography:** Subparts 2 and 3 may be completed over as many as two days.
 - Please reference the first bullet point in the “Operational Test Scheduling” section for information about subpart 1 of the U.S. history assessment.
 - **Chemistry and Biology:** Contains only one subpart that must be completed in one (1) day.
- Subjects with multiple subparts (i.e., all subjects except science) must be completed in numerical order.
- Subparts can be combined to administer them on the same day, if the district and/or school so chooses.
- Students in a test session do not have to be on the same subpart unless it is a read-aloud session. However, districts should be mindful that subparts may differ in the time allowed for student completion.

Field Testing

- Based on feedback from educators, we will administer stand-alone field tests, including one writing prompt in English language arts and one writing prompt in U.S. history. These writing field tests will take place at a *separate time outside the operational testing window*.
 - One-half to one-third of students will participate in these field tests, and the field test group will rotate each year. Districts will be required to participate in these field tests when selected in the rotation.
- Additionally, all students in grade 3–8 will take a social studies field test, which will occur *during the operational window*. It is required that this 3–8 social studies field test is completed in one day.
- Please see complete details regarding field tests planned for 2016-17 ([here](#)).

Test Format

- The department will be phasing in online assessment over the next three years. We will release additional details regarding the timeline for completing technology readiness proof points in early August.
- Based on proof points of the vendor's technology readiness to support your district with online administration, districts may have the option to allow high schools to complete EOC tests for English language arts, math, and U.S. history/geography online.
 - If a district has the option to consider online administration for EOCs in high schools based on the early proof points, the district can choose to administer EOCs online in *all* high schools **OR** choose *some* high schools to complete EOC tests online and *some* high schools complete EOC tests on paper.
 - Districts, however, cannot administer online to *only* specific subject areas. Thus, if a high school tests online, all EOC exams in that school must be taken online. In other words, districts cannot administer math assessments online and ELA and U.S. history assessments on paper.
 - *Please note, the EOC chemistry and biology tests are available in paper-and-pencil format only.*
- For 2016-17, test formats will be as follows:
 - **Paper/pencil only:** *Please note, there will be separate test books and response documents for each content area for paper/pencil tests.*
 - All testing in grades 3–8 (ELA, math, science, and social studies)
 - ELA, math, and U.S. history EOC exams administered in during fall block window
 - Biology and chemistry EOCs administered during fall block or the spring window
 - Grade 2 and Grade 2-Alternative for ELA and math
 - TCAP Alternative for grades 3–11 in social studies and science
 - **Online optional:**
 - High school ELA, math, and U.S. history/geography EOCs administered during spring window
 - **Online only:**
 - TCAP Alternative for grades 3–11 using MSAA for ELA and math
- For test security, there will be multiple test forms, multiple test versions, and items mixed within the versions.

Practice Tools

- The department will provide practice tools to support educators and students.
 - **Paper Practice Tests:** PDF versions of practice tests for all grades will be available by mid-August and posted on EdTools. These will be largely the same as last year's practice tests, with a few updates to reflect design and structure changes detailed in the updated blueprints.
 - **Online Practice Tests:** The online versions of the practice test will be available in early November.
 - As previously stated, no online administration for operational tests will occur until the spring (for districts who choose online administration for high school students).
 - **Online Item Sampler:** The online item sampler tool will be available for next school year, and we are finalizing the timeline for release with the vendor. The department will provide additional details in early September regarding the timeline for the release of the online item sampler tool later in the school year.

Attachment 6



Fact Sheet on the 2016-17 TCAP Assessment

The 2016-17 TCAP assessment shares the same goals we have been working toward for several years: it is a better, fully aligned assessment that captures the depth and breadth of what students are learning—and have been learning—in the classroom every day. The information from this assessment will provide educators, parents, and students with a big-picture perspective on how they are progressing academically compared to their peers across Tennessee, and better information about a student's strengths, needs, and areas for growth.

State tests should always complement the other feedback loops that teachers, parents, and students use to get a more complete picture of a student's development, including classroom performance, report cards, portfolios, performances, and other ways students show their growth. State tests are not meant to be the sole driver of any instructional decisions.

For the 2016-17 TCAP, the department will work with a qualified, proven vendor; streamline and reduce testing time; and reset the conversation on the role of assessments in Tennessee. The department heard from educators, families, and students—as well as the state's Assessment Task Force, which was created to support intentional and streamlined assessments—about their ideas to improve testing and was able to take significant steps in response.

Overall, **students will spend about 30 percent less time taking state tests this year.** In grades 3-8, TCAP has been shortened by 200-210 minutes, depending on the grade. Most End of Course assessments have been reduced by 40-120 minutes; the only End of Course tests that are unchanged are biology and chemistry, which are already the shortest End of Course tests.

Additionally, testing logistics and scheduling will improve. Instead of a Part I and Part II, **the test will be given in a single administration window at the end of the school year.** To minimize the impact on the overall school environment, this window will be **one week shorter** than last year. And, instead of longer subtests, **students will take the test in a series of shorter subparts**, which are often small enough—sometimes as little as 30 minutes—to fit into the normal school schedule. While the department will continuously seek to improve testing in Tennessee, these changes move us forward as follows:

- **Math:** Part I has been eliminated. Instead, the assessment will be given at the end of the school year over the course of three shorter subparts. Concepts that had been incorporated into Part I will be assessed using math problems called integrated tasks, which will measure problem-solving skills. As was the case for last year's test, there will be a mix of calculator-permitted and calculator-prohibited subparts. Depending on the grade, **a student in grades 3-8 will see a reduction of 20-25 minutes in math. Each End of Course assessment in math has been shortened by 65 minutes—which is more than a 30 percent reduction from last year.**

- **English language arts:** The writing portion that had previously been tested as a Part I in February has now been folded into the English language arts assessment at the end of the school year, which will be given in four shorter subparts over the course of one assessment window. The department has worked with its new vendor to expedite the hand-scoring process—which is the reason why the writing section has traditionally been given earlier—and will provide guidance to districts about how to schedule this subpart early in the test window. The department is also reducing questions where possible.

Last year, all students responded to a writing prompt that was operational (meaning, it was scored) and one field test prompt (meaning, it did not factor into a student’s score and instead helped the department to determine whether the prompt would be appropriate for future tests). This year, in response to feedback from teachers and concerns about student stamina, the department will restructure field testing. Under the new structure, only about one-third to one-half of all students will participate in a separate writing field test, and they will do so about a month prior to the main testing window. The writing prompt for the U.S. history exam will also be field tested during this time. Districts will be selected to participate in field testing on a rotational basis—about once every two years.

Depending on the grade, **students in grades 3-8 will have a reduction of 75-95 minutes in ELA, not including the writing field test. Each End of Course assessment in English will be 120 minutes shorter—which reduces the test by more than a third for some students.**

- **Social studies:** Part I has been eliminated, and the entire test in grades 3-8 will be a field test this year. All students will participate in the field test during the 2016-17 end-of-year test window. Field tests are *not* scored for a grade and do *not* factor into educators’ evaluations. Instead, field testing is a process that education leaders and psychometricians use to ensure that, for future tests, students are only scored on test questions that are valid and appropriate for them to take. **The grade 3-8 field test will be given in one, 50-minute test. That is 85-95 minutes shorter than last year’s test—a reduction of as much as 66 percent, or two-thirds.**

U.S. history, which is the only state End of Course exam in social studies, will be given in three subparts at the end of the year and **will be 40 minutes shorter than last year.**

- **Science:** The science test has never included a Part I. It will be given in two subparts at the end of the school year for grades 3-8, and in one sitting for the End of Course exams. This test has not yet been reworked to include multiple types of questions, but while it is still a multiple-choice test, the department plans to redesign the test in future years to better capture what students are learning and able to do, which would give it a similar feel to the other state assessments. The science test has not changed in time from last year.

Scoring

Scores and raw data from the 2015-16 state tests will be available in fall 2016, as the department outlined last year. Students who took End of Course exams in ELA, math, and U.S. history will receive full, newly redesigned score reports, which will provide better information to parents and students. Results from grades 3-8 will be more limited, raw data—for example, the department will be able to share how many questions a student answered correctly, but not what that score means in terms of a student's proficiency and growth level.

However, for the 2016-17 assessment, the department has worked to not only hand-score test questions more efficiently, but to also provide results on an earlier timeline for high school students, educators, and families. For End of Course exams, the department is planning for results to be available for families and schools in summer 2017. Grades 3-8 test results will be on a different timeline. Because it is the first year we will be able to fully administer the new tests for grades 3-8, the scoring results will be delayed while Tennessee teachers and the department complete the scoring process during the summer. Therefore, the results for grades 3-8 will not be released until fall 2017. During future test administrations, the department will publish results for grades 3-8 and high school on a similar timeline.

Additional facts to know:

- As of the 2015-16 school year:
 - Number of students in Tennessee: 995,892
 - Number of teachers in Tennessee: 63,170
 - Number of schools in Tennessee: 1,811
 - How many are high schools: 418
 - Number of districts in Tennessee: 146
- Testing window for 2016-17:
 - Fall Block: Nov. 28-Dec. 16, 2016
 - Traditional and Spring Block: April 15-May 5, 2017
- History of testing in Tennessee:
 - 1983: Tennessee began annual statewide testing to provide important information about the collective progress of students in our state with the Tennessee Proficiency Test
 - 1988: Tennessee State Board of Education commissioned the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP)
 - 1992: The Education Improvement Act (EIA) made TCAP a state mandated assessment
 - 2015: First year of a new assessment with different, more rigorous questions



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 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 (here) 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 science 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.

Attachment 8



Field Testing for 2016-17

Tennessee districts and schools will participate in required field tests during the 2016-17 school year, as well as have the choice to participate in optional field tests. Field tests, required and optional, will not be included in teacher, school, or district accountability results, and student performance will not be reported. Field tests are very important for informing future test design—the information from field tests is used to development future assessments using authentic student data.

Required Field Tests	Time (min)
ELA Writing (Grades 3–11)	75/85
U.S. History Open Response	50
Social Studies (Grades 3–8)	50

Optional Field Tests	Time (min)
Grade 2 (ELA and Math)*	40/42
Grade 2/Alt (ELA and Math)*	Varies
TCAP/Alt (Social Studies & Science; Grades 3–8)	Varies
TCAP/Alt Biology	Varies

** Grants will be awarded for school participation in Grade 2 and Grade 2 Alternative assessments. See details below.*

Required Field Tests

The following field tests are required for students in identified grades and subjects. These field tests support the development of future assessments, and districts and schools must participate.

ELA (Grades 3-11)

Field Test Window: March 2017 (specific dates TBD)

Time: 75 minutes (Grades 3–5) 85 minutes (Grades 6–11)

Students in selected districts will participate in ELA field tests outside the operational testing window. The ELA field test will include one subpart featuring a writing prompt. Only 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. Districts and schools selected must participate in this field test. Those districts will be notified in September 2016.

U.S. History

Field Test Window: March 2017 (specific dates TBD)

Time: 50 minutes

Students in selected districts will participate U.S. history field tests outside the operational testing window. The U.S. history field test will include one subpart featuring an extended response item. Only 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. Districts and schools selected must participate in this field test. Those districts will be notified in September 2016.

Social Studies (Grades 3–8)

Field Test Window: April 17 – May 5, 2016

Time: 50 minutes

There will not be an operational social studies test for students in grades 3–8 in 2016-17. However, all students will participate in a mandatory 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.

Optional Field Tests

The following field tests are optional for district participation.

The Grade 2 field test is a unique administration in terms of its use to develop an *optional* state assessment. The department understands that most districts have not yet determined if they will participate in the new Grade 2 assessment, and this field test window is at a time during the year that we are not typically completing state assessments in elementary schools. Moreover, we will be asking for third grade teachers and students to engage in this field test to gather information that won't be used for the third grade assessment. For all these reasons, we want to provide those schools that choose to participate a small token of appreciation to acknowledge their additional effort in completing the Grade 2 field test. Therefore, the following **grants** for participation will be awarded:

- Participation in Grade 2 Alternative assessment only: \$100 per school
- Participation in Grade 2 (and Grade 2 Alt, if applicable): \$200 per school for up to 100 students
- Participation in Grade 2 (and Grade 2 Alt, if applicable): \$400 per school for 100 or more students
- Bonus Grant: \$5,000 awarded to one school randomly selected from all participating schools in Grade 2 or Grade 2 Alternative field test.

Grant awards will be determined by actual student participants, based on response documents returned to vendor. Grants will be paid by November 30, 2016.

Grade 2 Assessment

Field Test Window: September 19–23, 2016

Time: 40 minutes for ELA and 42 minutes for math

Elementary schools will have the option to take part in a field test of the new TCAP Grade 2 assessment in September 2016. To help prevent pre-exposure, districts have the option to administer a field test to third grade students based on content standards they learned in the prior school year. Districts may administer the two forms for ELA and math on different days during the five-day window for the assessment.

This field test will be administered on paper by Questar and will help ensure that the assessment vendor has authentic student work from Tennessee students to inform test development and the scoring of the TCAP Grade 2 assessment.

For districts who choose to participate in the optional Grade 2 field test (given to third graders), orders will be placed for participating schools in EdTools. The order window will open Wednesday, July 27, and will close Wednesday, August 17. Districts will need to update pre-ID enrollment information for third grade students participating in the Grade 2 field test (given to third graders) by the end of August. The department will share more details on this process July 27.

Grade 2-Alternative Assessment

Field Test Window: October 24–28, 2016

Time: Varies, based on student needs

Elementary schools will have the option to take part in a field test of the new TCAP Grade 2 Alternative assessment in September 2016. To help prevent pre-exposure, districts have the option to administer a field test to third grade students based on content standards they learned in the prior school year.

This field test will be administered on paper by Questar and will help ensure that the assessment vendor has authentic student work from Tennessee students to inform test development and the scoring of the TCAP Grade 2 assessment. Teachers may administer the test over multiple days during the five-day window and take as much time as required based on student needs. The department estimates that administration may take up to an hour per content area over the course the administration window.

For districts who choose to participate in the optional Grade 2 Alternative field test (given to third graders), orders will be placed for participating schools in EdTools. The order window will open in mid-August. Districts will need to update pre-ID enrollment information for third grade students participating in the Grade 2 Alternative field test (given to third graders) by early-September. The department will share more details on this process on July 27.

TCAP-Alternative for Science and Social Studies

Field Test Window: October 17 – November 4, 2016

Time: Varies, based on student needs

Schools will have the option to take part in a field test of the new TCAP Alternate assessments for science and social studies. To help prevent pre-exposure, students will be tested on the grade level they completed in 2016. Students in grades 4-9 and 11 may use the entire window to complete the test.

This field test will be administered on paper by Questar and will help ensure that the assessment vendor has authentic student work from Tennessee students to inform test development and the scoring of the assessment. Teachers may administer the test over multiple days during the five-day window and take as much time as required based on student needs. The department estimates that administration may take up to an hour per content area over the course the administration window.

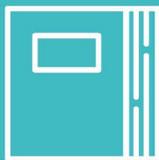
For districts who wish to participate in the optional TCAP Alternate field tests (Grade 3–8 science and social studies and high school Biology), orders will be placed for participating schools in EdTools. The

order window will open in mid-August. Districts will need to update pre-ID enrollment information for students participating in the Alternate field test by early-September. The department will share more details on this process on July 27.

WHY TEST?

Assessments play a key role in the teaching and learning process. They answer the questions: "Are we teaching what we think we are teaching?" and "Are students learning what they are supposed to be learning?"

Different tests serve different purposes.



Formative assessments help teachers gain insight into what students are learning so they can tailor instruction. These may be formal, like chapter tests or screeners, or they may be casual moments where a teacher polls the class to check for understanding.



Summative assessments inform students, teachers, parents, and the community of achievement at a certain point in time in order to celebrate success, plan interventions, help educators improve their practice, and support continued progress.



All assessments help students develop an awareness of how they learn and what they have mastered, so they can take an increased responsibility for their academic success.

Assessment plays a role in supporting student learning. But testing should never dominate a school culture. Instead classrooms should be focused on high quality instruction every day.

WHY WE HAVE STATE TESTS

In every Tennessee classroom, teaching and learning looks different based on the textbooks, curricula, and lessons that school and teacher has chosen. State leaders have a responsibility to make sure these varied learning opportunities are preparing all students for college, career, and life.

Our state tests serve multiple objectives:

- Provide feedback about students' academic progress and how it aligns with grade-level expectations
- Give 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
- Build confidence and transparency about students' readiness for college and the workforce among Tennessee universities and employers
- Help educators strengthen instruction and reflect on their practice
- Hold us accountable to serving all students fairly
- Highlight schools where students are excelling, so we can learn from those who are doing well

