

## Frequently Asked Questions 2017-18 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. How are teachers involved in the assessment process?**

- Tennessee teachers are an integral part of the entire assessment process—from item writing through standards setting. Teachers are involved in the item writing, item review, bias and sensitivity review, accessibility review, and range finding processes. Also, both educators and community members participate in the standards setting process.
  - **Item writing:** Tennessee educators are trained to write items that will eventually be on field tests and operational tests.
  - **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.
- **Range finding:** 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.
- **Standard setting:** Tennessee stakeholders including parents, educators, and community members review actual test items and recommend the cut scores for each performance level descriptor (below, approaching, on-track, and mastery) for the assessments.

### **3. What grades and subjects will have state assessments during the 2017-18 school year?**

- **Grade 2 (optional)**
  - Districts choose whether to administer the optional, second-grade assessment.
- **Grades 3–8:**
  - Students in grades 3–8 will take assessments in math, English language arts (ELA), social studies, and science.
  - 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.

### **4. What changes have been made to the 2017-18 state assessments since last school year?**

- All high school students will test online this year. Districts have the option for students in grades 5–8 to test online.
- There will be an operational social studies assessment for grades 3–8 this year.
- The most notable changes are in the English language arts (ELA) assessments in grades 3 and 4. As a result of these changes to the ELA test, the science and social studies

assessments for these grades have been reduced in half. Please note the following ELA assessment changes:

- The ELA test is slightly longer due to new item types that fully assess the breadth and depth of the academic standards.
- The writing section is revised in a way that flows better with the second grade assessment. The thoughtful progression from second through fifth grade that shows how writing skills build on each other from year to year.
- Students will be asked to respond to two writing prompts—one informational and one literature—  
—with one paragraph per response.
- Listening and fluency items are new this year.
  - **Listening:** Students will be assessed on their listening comprehension skills through a series of sentences and short passages.
  - **Fluency:** Students' reading fluency and comprehension will be assessed through the use of yes or no responses to independently read sentences containing grade-appropriate vocabulary.

#### **5. 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). Districts determine specific testing dates during the testing window.
  - State assessments will be administered during a three-week window between **April 16 and May 4**. The first subpart (writing portion) of the ELA assessment and U.S. history subpart one 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 27 through December 15**.
- 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.
- You can view a detailed assessment calendar [here](#).

#### **6. How are tests scheduled within the three-week window?**

Districts must administer subpart 1 (writing portion) of the ELA and U.S. history assessments during the first week of the testing window. Aside from that requirement, districts have the flexibility to determine the schedule that best suits their needs.

#### **7. How are the assessments structured in the 2017-18 school year?**

- All assessments, with the exception of science and social studies in grades 3 and 4 and biology and chemistry in high school, are delivered in multiple subparts. This structure allows for greater scheduling flexibility. You can view detailed test structure information in the assessment blueprints [here](#).
- 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 rotates 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.

**8. How much time will students spend taking state assessments this year?**

- Please see the complete testing times chart [here](#).
- *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.

**9. 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 assessments for high school will be online. Districts will have the option to administer state assessments online for grades 5–8. Grades 3 and 4 will be administered via paper and pencil. More details are available [here](#).
- 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.

**10. When will we receive scores for the 2017-18 assessments?**

- **Raw scores:** Raw data provides a limited view of student performance; districts use convert data to numerical grades, based on scales set by local board policy.
  - **High schools on block schedule:** January (fall block) and end of the school year (spring block)
  - **Grades 2–12 on traditional schedule:** End of the school year
- **Detailed score reports:** The score reports (example [here](#)), which paint a detailed view of student performance, will be sent to districts for distribution to students/families. Each district has its own method for distributing score reports. Student reports offer detailed information on student performance, including strengths, areas for growth, and suggested next steps.
  - **High school End-of-Course assessments:** Late summer 2018
  - **Grade 2:** Late summer of 2018
  - **Grades 3 and 4:** Fall of 2018 for distribution to families (science will not have score reports).
  - **Grades 5–8:** Late summer of 2018 for distribution to families (social studies score reports for grades 5–8 will be provided in fall 2018).

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

- Strong instruction every day is the best preparation for students. Revised assessment blueprints, released in May, provide an overview of test structure and can be found [here](#). Current academic standards are available [here](#). We also encourage educators to access our standards training materials ([here](#) within the “Teacher Training” section).
- Practice tests are available on EdTools ([here](#)). Contact your building-level testing coordinator for your EdTools log-in credentials.
- These practice tests will be available on the online platform, Nextera, from late September to November during the fall semester and from January to mid-April during the spring semester. We encourage all students who will be testing online to practice using the platform.
- The Classroom Assessment Builder (CAB), which contains additional practice items and allows teachers to custom-build classroom practice tests, will be available in September.
- A limited number of test items from the 2016-17 assessments will be released in November.
- Teachers of students with the most significant cognitive disabilities can continue to utilize NCSPpartners.org or the NCSC wiki for MSAA preparation.

**12. What information will teachers receive about student performance?**

- All students receive detailed individual score reports (example here)
- Additionally, teachers can reflect on their students’ overall performance using the detailed class roster reports and standards analysis reports. Class roster reports ([here](#)) provide an overview of how individual students performed on the assessment, and students are grouped according to their performance level. Standards analysis reports ([here](#)) provide an overview of all student performance on individual standards. In other words, teachers can determine areas of their instruction where students performed well, as well as areas where there is room for more growth.

**13. How will students’ performance factor into teacher evaluation this year?**

- Student performance will factor into evaluation, as outlined in the Tennessee Teaching Evaluation Enhancement Act, at a minimum of 20 percent of an educator’s level of overall effectiveness for the 2017-18 school year. The most recent year’s student growth score will count for the full 35 percent student growth component if this results in the highest overall evaluation score for the teacher.

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

- The full range of accommodations will be available to ensure students’ IEPs are followed during testing.
- IEP teams are provided guidance ([here](#)) on how to select appropriate accommodations for this year. The accommodation options will be similar to last year.

**15. What supports are available for students during testing?**

- Decisions regarding test accessibility supports must be made on an individual student basis and must be required for the student to access the content.
- Additional details regarding test accessibility is available in the Accessibility Guide.

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

- ELs are required to participate in any state or federal mandated assessments, including achievement assessments.
- 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.

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

- This assessment determines proficiency levels for ELs and allows 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 personally tailored for each student by the test administrator.
- All WIDA assessments cover all four domains: reading, writing, speaking, and listening.
- This assessment is given to ELs in the spring.

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

- The department offers an optional grade two assessment. This criterion-referenced assessment was created in partnership with Tennessee teachers and measures student learning of the Tennessee Academic Standards for mathematics and ELA. District leaders opt in to the grade two assessment.
- You can access practice materials for Grade 2 in EdTools.
- 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.
- Students in kindergarten and first grade do not take traditional, standardized state assessments. This year the department is partnering with districts to implement a Kindergarten Entry Inventory (KEI); however, the KEI is not a standardized assessment; rather, it is a tool that provides information for teachers and parents on students' strengths and areas for growth when they enter kindergarten.

**19. If a middle school student takes a course with an EOC, such as Algebra I, does he or she have to take the EOC and the grade-level math test?**

- No. The student will only take the EOC.

**20. Can a student get partial credit for a question?**

- Partial credit is dependent on the item type and subject area. For example, when you have a two part item in math with an A and B part, the parts are scored independently. Students

can earn a point for A and/or a point for B, so this is not partial credit. However, in some questions on the ELA assessments, part B is dependent on part A, so partial credit would be given if a student answers A correctly and not B, or vice versa.

- The writing prompts in both ELA and U.S. history are scored by giving partial credit.
- The multiple select items do not have partial credit.
- Please see the item types document ([here](#)) for additional information.

**21. What do teachers have to cover up on their walls during testing?**

- An educational environment should be maintained during testing so that students and faculty are comfortable and familiar with their surroundings.
- It is not necessary to cover the walls; however, **it is not appropriate to create or display posters, anchor charts, bulletin boards, student samples, study aids, or other decorations that are so content specific as to provide students with possible answers to test questions.**
- In addition, the only reference material that students should be provided are those supplied with the testing materials.
- Further details about test administration will be released in the updated Test Administration Manual (TAM), which is updated before each testing window and posted on EdTools.
- Also, please consult your local district policies regarding test security and administration.

**22. What if a student is absent?**

- District has the option to allow the student to make up the test during a make-up day. If the student does not make up the test on a make-up day, the district should use local attendance policy to determine how this will factor into the student's grade.

**23. Why do students have to take subparts in order?**

- The writing portion of the ELA and U.S. history assessment must be administered during the first week of the assessment window. This is because student writing is individually hand scored.
- To ensure that students complete all of the subparts and to mitigate logistical issues (such as providing the incorrect answer document for a particular subpart), students should complete the subparts in order.

**24. Are students allowed to read when they are finished with the test?**

- Yes, so long as the reading is not specific to the content area being tested. If a student finishes testing prior to the scheduled time, they may do quiet academic activities that are not related to the content area being tested.
- Further details about test administration will be released in the updated Test Administration Manual (TAM), which is updated before each testing window and posted on EdTools.

**25. Are students allowed to use scratch paper?**

- Yes. Students may have clean, blank scratch paper during all assessments. Scratch paper may be lined, unlined, or graph paper and should be collected and securely destroyed after each testing session.
- Further details about test administration will be released in the updated Test Administration Manual (TAM), which is updated before each testing window and posted on EdTools.

## English Language Arts

### **26. How is the ELA test structured?**

- Students in grades 3–11 take the ELA test in four subparts. The first subpart asks students to respond to a text-dependent writing prompt. The other subparts include multiple item types.
- All subparts are administered near the end of the school year, or for high school students on block schedule, at the end of each semester.

### **27. How many writing prompts do students complete?**

- Students respond to one writing prompt per reading passage set. In most grades, this means that they will respond to one writing prompt total. In grade 3, however, students will respond to two total writing prompts (one response for each passage set); these students will be asked to write one paragraph per response. In the future grades, students will have only one written response, but the length of the response requested will be longer.
- Students will have one writing prompt for U.S. History & Geography.

### **28. What mode of writing is tested?**

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

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

- Yes. Students will be asked to answer several passage-based questions before the writing prompt.
- We believe that multiple-choice questions before the writing prompt will encourage students to closely read the text.

### **30. How is writing scored?**

- The scoring process starts with range finding.
- During range finding 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.

### **31. 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 rotates each year.

### **32. 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**

### **33. How is the math test structured?**

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

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

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

### **35. Are students able to use a calculator?**

- Students are not allowed to use calculators during the first math subpart. Students will be allowed to use calculators for the second and third math subparts.
- You can find reference sheets and calculator guidance in the assessment blueprints [here](#).

### **36. Why is time limited for the calculator prohibited subpart?**

- A time limit is necessary to fully assess procedural and computational fluency, number sense, and conceptual understanding.
- Students must work within a time limit to demonstrate how they can rely on these skills to efficiently work with mathematics without a calculator.
- You can learn more about the calculator prohibited subpart [here](#).

### **37. 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

**38. How is the science test structured?**

- Generally, science standards, test structure, and item types are the same as in recent years.
- In grades 3 and 4, the test has been cut in half in order to allow for a more robust ELA test. Despite the shorter test, the expectations for learning have not changed. In order to prepare students for content in grades 5–8 and high school, it is important to continue engaging students in rich science instruction.
- High school students in biology and chemistry take the test in one subpart.
- The revised science standards and aligned assessment will be implemented in the 2018-19 school year.

**39. How much time do students have to complete the test?**

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

**40. Do students have the option to take science online?**

- No.

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

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

## Social Studies

**42. How is the social studies test structured?**

- There is an operational social studies test for students in grades 3–8 this year.
- In grades 3 and 4, the test has been cut in half in order to allow for a more robust ELA test. Despite the shorter test, the expectations for learning have not changed. In order to prepare students for content in grades 5–8 and high school, it is important to continue engaging students in rich social studies instruction.
- Details about social studies for grades 5–8 is forthcoming.
- The U.S. history test is administered in three subparts. The first subpart includes 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 has been used in recent years.

**43. How much time do students have to complete the test?**

- Testing time is slightly different based on subject and grade level. Please review the testing time chart [here](#). Please note, additional details about social studies for grades 5–8 is forthcoming.

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

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