

## FAQs on Driver Skills Testing and Third Party Examiners

The following information has been compiled by the TN Department of Safety's CDL Division and is intended to help school districts understand how to schedule driver skills testing and the process of using or becoming a third party examiner.

\*This information is considered valid as of August 5, 2020, however districts should use the TN Department of Safety contacts and websites found within this document to find the most up to date information.

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### 1. What is the Commercial Driver's License (CDL) program?

- a. The Commercial Driver's License (CDL) program is a partnership between the Federal Government, the State of Tennessee and third-party testing organizations. More detailed information can be found on the following websites:

<https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/>;

<https://www.tn.gov/safety/driver-services.html>; and

<https://www.tn.gov/safety/driver-services/commercial-driver-license.html>.

It is important to become familiar with these sites as they provide the most current information.

### 2. How do applicants obtain a CDL permit?

- a. CDL applicants begin the process of certification by taking a physical from a nationally registered medical examiner. If applicants meet the minimum physical standards, they receive a medical certification, form MCSA-5876. The forms are better known as "medcerts" or "DOT physical forms". The following link helps applicants locate certified medical examiners:

<https://www.fmcsa.dot.gov/national-registry-certified-medical-examiners-search>.

Other documents may be required by the Department of Motor Vehicles to verify identity and eligibility. Call or check the website to ensure the driver applicant has all necessary documentation prior to arriving for testing.

CDL applicants should study the Tennessee CDL manual. The manual is provided in digital format only and is found at the following link:

<https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/safety/documents/CDLManual.pdf>.

After mastering the information in the CDL manual, applicants should obtain a CDL permit by completing all required knowledge tests. Applicants attempting to become a school bus driver would take the following knowledge tests:

- i. General knowledge;
- ii. Air brakes;
- iii. Passenger; and
- iv. School bus.

If the applicant does not complete the licensing process, knowledge test(s) will expire one year from the date the test was taken.

Applicants can take knowledge tests at any full-service driver services center (DSC). Currently, there are 43 full-service DSCs in the state. The following link has a list of all the full-service DSCs; once the link is open, scroll down to “Locations” and click the down arrow next to “Full Service”:

<https://www.tn.gov/content/tn/safety/driver-services/locations/dllocationserv.html#full>.

Applicants with a CDL permit must wait 14 days before receiving a CDL skills test. Applicants should use the time to practice in a commercial motor vehicle (CMV) that represents the class and endorsements they are trying to earn. They may only drive a CMV while accompanied by an individual who is properly licensed and has the endorsement(s) to legally drive the representative CMV.

### **3. How do applicants schedule a skills test and where are the testing locations?**

- a. Applicants must make an appointment to test at one of the seven DSCs that provide the CDL skills test. Applicants should call 615-251-5217 from 8:30 am to 4:00 pm. Once the appointment is set, a detailed appointment confirmation email will be sent to the applicant with the date, time, location, and the required documents. When CDL applicants fail to convert their permit to a CDL by the permit’s expiration date, their skills test and knowledge test are no longer valid.

The testing locations are listed below:

- i. Chattanooga Driver Service Center (Bonny Oaks)  
6502 Bonny Oaks Drive  
Chattanooga, TN 37416  
(423) 634-3127  
Monday - Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time)

- ii. Columbia Driver Service Center  
1701 Hampshire Pike  
Columbia, TN 38401  
(931) 380-2548  
Monday - Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Central Time)
- iii. Cookeville Driver Service Center  
4600 South Jefferson Avenue  
Cookeville, TN 38506  
(931) 528-5669  
Monday - Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Central Time)
- iv. Jackson Driver Service Center  
100 Benchmark Circle  
Jackson, TN 38301  
(731) 423-6622  
Monday - Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Central Time)
- v. Johnson City Driver Service Center  
4717 Lake Park Dr  
Johnson City, TN 37615  
(423) 926-4911  
Monday - Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time)
- vi. Knoxville Driver Service Center (Strawberry Plains)  
7320 Region Lane  
Knoxville, TN 37914  
(865) 594-6399  
Monday - Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time)
- vii. Davidson County Driver Service Center (Hart Lane)  
624 Hart Lane  
Nashville, TN 37216  
(615) 532-9780  
Monday - Friday 8:30 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. (Eastern Time)

**4. Where can applicants find a list of third party examiners for skills testing?**

- a. Applicants have the option of using third party CDL examiners for skills testing.

The following link has a list of examiners that provide outside testing:

[https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/safety/documents/CDLThirdPartyTestingOrg\\_12042019.pdf](https://www.tn.gov/content/dam/tn/safety/documents/CDLThirdPartyTestingOrg_12042019.pdf). The chart notes the county; name of the organization; organization's address and phone number; examiner's name; and the class license and if they test for passenger and school bus.

**5. What is the process for school districts (organizations) to participate in the third party examiner program?**

- a. Schools districts should contact the TN Department of Safety CDL Division and complete the following steps.

- i. Complete organization application.
- ii. Organizations that will participate in Tennessee’s CDL Third Party Program will be chosen by a Department of Safety committee based on the needs of CDL Third Party Program.
- iii. Organizations shall have an established business location, within the geographical boundaries of the State of Tennessee. The established business location shall contain at least one permanent regularly occupied structure in which administrative and /or operational business is conducted. All Organizations:
  - iv. Shall have a land line phone accessible by public telephone.
  - v. Shall have a permanent mailing address, including a street address or route
  - vi. Shall be operationally and environmentally safe
  - vii. Shall meet all requirements of State Law and local ordinances
  - viii. Shall have internet, WIFI, and electronic mail (email) access
  - ix. Organizations must provide to the Department of Safety & Homeland Security a yearly administrative fee of \$250.00.
  - x. Organizations shall provide a safe and suitable testing area; shall designate an appropriate “on-road testing route” (a primary route and an alternate route).
  - xi. Organizations shall maintain bodily injury and property damage liability insurance on motor vehicles used in driving tests, insuring the liability of the testing program, the examiner and any person taking tests, in the amounts required by state law and to file evidence of such insurance coverage annually with the Department.
  - xii. Organizations shall maintain a DOT random drug testing program.

**6. Where can contact information for the TN Department of Safety CDL Division employees be found?**

- a. Contact information for the TN Department of Safety CDL Division key employees for the application process are as follows:
  - i. Timothy Gregory  
Director of Commercial Driver License  
[Timothy.gregory@tn.gov](mailto:Timothy.gregory@tn.gov)
  - ii. Lisa Ewing  
CDL & DTTP Manager  
[Lisa.ewing@tn.gov](mailto:Lisa.ewing@tn.gov)
  - iii. Rebecca Dickerson  
Compliance Manager  
615-251-6309  
[Rebecca.dickerson@tn.gov](mailto:Rebecca.dickerson@tn.gov)
  - iv. Scott Nicoll

Training Coordinator  
615-253-1713  
[Scott.nicoll@tn.gov](mailto:Scott.nicoll@tn.gov)

**7. Once certified, what are the requirements for an examiner to maintain their certification?**

- a. Examiners shall conduct a minimum of 10 complete tests within a 12-month period. Inactive examiners may be suspended or required to attend refresher training. Examiners are also required to take a biannual one-week refresher class. The class normally takes place at the Columbia DSC in Maury County. The class does not have tuition. However, depending on the examiners home location, the organization may have to pay for a hotel, per diem and mileage. When making the decision to have an applicant commute or stay in Columbia, an organization should consider, the examiner must pass several tests from an immense amount of material. The organization should ensure their examiner has time to study during the week. Long commute times will take away from their examiners study time. The CDL division may also require an organization to provide a school bus for the duration of the course.

**8. What are the requirements and best practices for maintenance of an official skills pad?**

- a. Any CDL skill test administered to individuals on a skills pad that is not in compliance with federal regulations is subjected for retest. If repairs on the skills pad are not completed in a timely manner an organization examiner may be suspended due to inactivity. This further delays the successful operation of an organization's testing program. This is a situation the CDL Division would like to avoid. Ideally, a skills pad should be located on a concrete or asphalt surface that measures 310 feet by 110 feet. The skills pad should be protected from other uses. Realistically, skills pads may be made of other surfaces, such as gravel, clay, crumbling asphalt or a combination of difference surfaces; however, these surfaces due to use and weather quickly move out of compliance. Examiners must be given the time to re-measure and maintain the skills pad. Two personnel are needed to measure a skills pad and re-set the lines. Skills pads may use other configurations to fit in smaller locations. An organization should place a skills pad in an area with good drainage away from trees that could fall on the testing area. Placing the skills pad in an area that is known to flood should be avoided at all cost. Upon request, the CDL division will send out a representative to review the proposed site and mark the locations of the boundary lines. Skills pads can have compliance issues when they have secondary uses or are shared by other parties. The following are a list of examples:
  - i. Vehicles parked in the testing area;
  - ii. The testing area used for storage;
  - iii. Vehicle or pedestrian traffic moving through testing area;

- iv. Vehicle or heavy equipment traffic moving markers or damaging border lines;
- v. Extra lines or markings placed in the testing area; and
- vi. Excessive noise from other parties in the area that prevent the applicant from hearing the examiner's directions or the examiner from hearing the applicant's answers. Examples of excessive noise are the use of power tools; operating or testing of vehicles or heavy equipment, and loudspeakers;

**9. What are the requirements for an approved road test route?**

- a. Once an organization is accepted into the program, the CDL Division will provide detailed instructions on how to complete a road test route. Public roads are used to create two courses consisting of more than 20 maneuvers. On average, an organization will need two days to design and document each route. The alternate route is used if it becomes impracticable to use the primary route because of an accident, construction, or unusual heavy traffic. Ideally, the primary and alternate routes should not use any of the same roads; however, this is normally impossible. In practice, the primary and alternate routes will share a few small sections. The number of roads shared is scrutinized during the approval process. Some organizations will need to have more than one alternate route because of traffic issues during different times of the day. The length of the route depends on finding locations for the different maneuvers. Organizations in urban areas tend to have shorter routes compared to organizations located in more rural areas. On average, both urban and rural routes take about 45 minutes to complete as increased traffic in the urban areas slow applicants' progress through the route. Road routes used for training purposes should not be the same routes used for testing purposes.

**10. What are the application requirements for a third party examiner?**

- a. Once an organization is accepted into the program, the CDL Division will request their examiners' applications. For an applicant to become a certified CDL Third Party Examiner the following requirements must be met:
  - i. Applicants must be 21 years of age.
  - ii. Applicants must be a high school graduate or equivalent or have qualifying substitute experience.
  - iii. Applicants must possess a valid Tennessee commercial driver license with the classification and endorsements required for operation of any class or type of commercial motor vehicle used in the skills tests to be conducted by the CDL examiner.
  - iv. Applicants must have a valid DOT medical card.
  - v. Applicants must provide the Department all employment and driving records for the last 10 years.

- vi. Applicants must provide a criminal background check completed within the last 12 months. The following link provides more information about the TBI background check: Background Checks.
- vii. Motor Vehicle Record (MVR) dated within the last 12 months. The following link provides more information about receiving an MVR from the Tennessee Department of Safety: MVR If the applicant has been licensed in other states during the past ten year the applicant will need to request MVRs for those states and include them in the application.
- viii. Within the past (10) years, applicants must have no record of driving under the influence of alcohol or controlled substances conviction(s) involving the possession, sale or use of a controlled substance; or of a felony conviction(s).
- ix. Applicants must participate in their organization's/school's DOT random drug testing program.
- x. Applicants must successfully complete the Department of Safety Commercial Driver Examiner Training Course and must successfully complete all knowledge and skills test necessary for the examiner classification sought.
- xi. Applicants must be chosen by the Department of Safety committee to attend the Department of Safety Commercial Driver Examiner Training Course.

**11. How does a third party examiner become eligible to test drivers outside their organization?**

- a. An organization only needs to complete a one-page notarized form. The CDL Division will provide the form once the organization is accepted into the program.

**12. What fees are an organization allowed to charge for testing?**

- a. If an organization provides outside testing, the organization must create a receipt signed and dated by both the examiner and the driver. The driver cannot be charged in excess of \$75.00 for the administration of the skills test and/or a lot fee of \$125.00. Organizations may charge a vehicle rental fee, if the driver is using a commercial motor vehicle provided by the CDL third party examiner. Payment may be cash, check, credit card or money order.

**13. What are the details with regards to cost and location for the two week examiners class?**

- a. The Third Party CDL Examiner Course is a two-week course normally conducted at the Columbia DSC in Maury County. Material cost is included within the \$250.00 annual fee. However, depending on the examiners home location, the organization may have to pay for a hotel, per diem and mileage. An organization must decide if they will allow an applicant to commute or stay in Columbia. However, an organization should consider, the examiner must pass several tests

from an immense amount of material. The organization should ensure their examiner has time to study during the week. Long commute times will take away from their examiners study time. The CDL division may also require an organization to provide a school bus for the duration of the course.

**14. Are there any requirements or best practices for the organization/examiner with regards to conducting tests and keeping records?**

- a. Examiners schedule tests using a web-based system called CSTIMS. During the Third Party CDL Examiner Course the examiners will receive training on scheduling in CSTIMS. After graduation, they should receive access within 72 hours the latest.

Third Party CDL Examiner Course provides the information to properly conduct the CDL test. Conducting the test is not easy. New examiners need the chance to gain experience. As stated earlier, an examiner must conduct ten complete tests to stay certified. In truth, a new examiner should complete between eight to ten tests a month to gain experience. Additionally, an organization must be ready to test once an examiner completes the class; this allows the examiners to use their new skills while the material is fresh in their mind.

During the Third Party CDL Examiner Course instructors will provide check lists for the four types of files: organization, examiner, Internal CDL applicant test, and outside CDL applicant test. The organization must provide a lockable filing cabinet in a limited access area. Each examiner should have their own key. Additionally, other staff members should have the ability to unlock the filing cabinet and have a basic knowledge of the file's organization. Department of Safety personnel may arrive unannounced anytime during normal working hours to review the files. A lack of an examiner on site cannot be an excuse for failure to provide files.