



Alternative Growth Measures for Pre-K Early Learning Division

Tennessee Department of Education | September 2025

Overview

The Pre-Kindergarten (Pre-K) Quality Act of 2016 was a critical piece of legislation focused on significantly improving the consistency and quality of Tennessee pre-K programs. This legislation included guidance for increased coordination between pre-K and elementary instruction, additional family engagement, plans for delivering relevant and meaningful professional development to educators, and a focus on kindergarten readiness. Additionally, this legislation required local education agencies (LEAs) receiving Voluntary Pre-K funds to utilize the pre-K/kindergarten growth portfolio model or an approved comparable alternative measure of student growth for all pre-K and kindergarten teachers. See [Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-105\(e\)](#).

In addition, the Tennessee Literacy Success Act of 2021, codified at [Tenn. Code Ann. §§ 49-1-901 – 49-1-910](#), requires all LEAs and public charter schools to screen each student in kindergarten through grade 3, three times per year. The screener data will help educators and the Tennessee Department of Education (department) better understand how students are learning to read across the state and help all stakeholders provide targeted support to increase reading skills across Tennessee. Further, [Chapter 0520-02-01-.03\(1\) of the State Board of Education Rules](#) and [State Board of Education Policy 5.201](#) allow LEAs and public charter schools to use the results of the Tennessee Universal Reading Screener (TN-URS) or another universal reading screener, approved by the State Board of Education, as an approved alternative growth measure (AGM) for pre-K through grade 2 teachers.

Purpose

This document ensures LEAs have the information to implement pre-K student growth measurement options for all four-year-olds. While the data collected is intended to be used in models of teacher evaluation, this data may also be used to inform instructional decisions to improve quality. With the addition of the legislative updates listed above, LEAs and public charter schools receiving pre-K funding approval under the Voluntary Pre-K for Tennessee Act must utilize the pre-K/kindergarten growth portfolio model or an approved AGM for the student growth score portion of teacher evaluations.

Definitions

Three-year-old: A child who is three years of age on or before August 15, with or without an IEP.

Four-year-old: A child who is four years of age on or before August 15, with or without an IEP.

Five-year-old: A child who is five years of age on or before August 15, with or without an IEP.

General Education Early Childhood Program: Encompasses range of LEA classroom models and funding streams including Voluntary Pre-K (VPK), Title 1, Head Start collaborative classrooms, fee-based, inclusive early childhood special education, and locally funded programs, serving children ages 3-5 and not in kindergarten, where at least 50 percent of the children enrolled do **not** have Individualized Education Programs (IEPs).

- **Voluntary Pre-K (VPK):** State-funded pre-K grant serving economically disadvantaged three- and four-year-old children with and without IEPs. See [Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-6-104](#).
- **Fee-based Pre-K:** LEA program supported by tuition-based fees collected from the families of the students enrolled.
- **Locally Funded Pre-K:** LEA program supported by district funds such as general-purpose funds or local education funds.
- **Title 1 Pre-K:** LEA program supported by Title 1 funds.
- **Head Start Collaborative Pre-K:** LEA program supported by braiding funds from Head Start and another funding source.

Comprehensive Preschool: In this LEA program, all children on the daily roster have an IEP or are in the child find eligibility process. This program was previously referred to as a *self-contained* preschool classroom.

Teacher of Record (TOR): An individual properly endorsed and licensed to teach in Tennessee in compliance with state law, including [Chapter 0520-02-03 of the State Board of Education Rules](#) and [State Board of Education Policy 5.502](#). This includes any educator meeting the legal requirement of being properly credentialed with a permit or waiver. Commonly referred to as the “classroom teacher.”

Alternative tool: General term intended to provide educators with the flexibility to identify an appropriate and accessible assessment for the student’s individual needs to guide data-based instructional decisions.

Student Growth Measurement Options for Pre-K

- Visit the [Pre-K/Kindergarten Growth Portfolio section](#) if your district has selected the **pre-K/kindergarten growth portfolio model** as your district's growth measure.
- Visit the [Alternative Growth Measure \(AGM\) – Universal Reading Screener \(URS\) section](#) if your district has selected **TN-URS or another approved alternative** as your district's growth measure.

Pre-K/Kindergarten Growth Portfolio

Background

Tennessee Education Acceleration Model (TEAM) student growth portfolios were designed in response to requests from teachers in non-tested grades for a measure of student growth for use in their evaluations, comparable to that of the Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS). Student growth portfolios are a streamlined approach to standards selection focused on skills-based mastery. There is clear alignment between grade-level standards and student expectations, and there is an increased focus on foundational reading skills. Portfolios have embedded tasks provided to give clear expectations of student performance of the standards. Scores generated by peer-reviewed student growth portfolios represent 35 percent of participating teachers' Level of Overall Effectiveness (LOE) score within the state's TEAM evaluation model in lieu of individual TVAAS scores that teachers in tested grades generate.

All pre-K teachers in implementing districts or public charter schools who are the teachers of record in a regular early childhood program with at least three four-year-old children are required to complete a portfolio. The portfolio score is an individual growth score and will serve as 35 percent of the level of overall effectiveness (LOE) score, meaning their LOE score will be calculated as a tested teacher.

If the pre-K teacher is the teacher of record in a Comprehensive Preschool, they will not be rostered to complete a portfolio, and their LOE score will be calculated as a non-tested teacher. This decision should be made annually to ensure the roster of pre-K teachers completing a portfolio aligns with the requirements. Please see the [TEAM website](#) for additional information.

Which pre-K teachers are required to complete a student growth portfolio?

Pre-K teachers **required** to complete a student growth portfolio meet the following requirements:

- Licensed pre-K teacher,
- Employed by the LEA in a regular early childhood program, **and**
- Staffed in TNCompass and serve as teacher of record of at least three four-year-old students.

Which pre-K teachers are not required to complete a student growth portfolio?

Pre-K teachers **not required** to complete a student growth portfolio include the following:

- Pre-K teachers who are the teacher of record for fewer than three four-year-old students,
- Pre-K teachers who are the teacher of record in single-age three-year-old classrooms,
- Pre-K teachers assigned to teach in three or more schools,
- Substitutes, including those with a teaching license, and interim teachers,

- Pre-K teachers in a Comprehensive Preschool, **or**
- Pre-K teachers who have fewer than three four-year-old students assessed at both Point A and Point B*.

*Each student growth portfolio collection must consist of both Point A and Point B samples of student work for **the same three** students. (See page 4 of the [TEAM Student Growth Portfolio Guidebook for Administrators and Teachers](#).)

What if the number of four-year-olds enrolled in a pre-K classroom changes over the course of the school year?

Pre-K teachers assess all four-year-old students with or without an IEP at Point A. At Point B, pre-K teachers conduct purposeful sampling to select three students to use in their portfolio. The students must have a Point A and a Point B. If the pre-K teacher only had three four-year-old students at Point A, and they do not have the same three four-year-old students at Point B, the teacher would be removed from the roster by the LEA portfolio lead. Additional information can be found in the [Quick Guide to Portfolio Teacher Rostering Process](#).

How are LOE scores generated for pre-K teachers who are not required to complete a student growth portfolio?

Pre-K teachers who are not required to complete a student growth portfolio due to any of the circumstances listed above will receive a composite score as the 15 percent school-wide growth measure, and their LOE score will be calculated as a non-tested teacher. Please see the [TEAM website](#) for additional information.

Are three-year-old and/or five-year-old pre-K students required to be assessed using student growth portfolios?

Pre-K student growth portfolios assess four-year-old standards. Three-year-old students in a pre-K classroom should not be assessed on the four-year-old standards. All other students in the pre-K classroom should be assessed regardless of whether they are four or five years old.

Will training be available for pre-K teachers related to portfolio implementation?

The department provides portfolio training through online modules and virtual sessions for the LEA portfolio leads. Pre-K teachers receive training from their LEA-assigned portfolio leads. The [TEAM website](#) also includes teacher-specific information and training links for portfolio implementation.

Are pre-K teachers required to complete both student growth portfolios and Universal Reading Screener?

LEAs may require the administration of the URS for all pre-K students. However, educators must select between pre-K/kindergarten student growth portfolio or a universal reading screener for growth score generation. LEAs must operate in alignment with [Chapter 385 of the Public Acts of 2025](#) (PC 385), which allows individual pre-K teachers to elect to use URS as AGM, if the URS is administered in the LEA.

Are all pre-K teachers in our district required to use the same student growth model?

PC 385 requires LEAs and public charter schools to allow each pre-K teacher to use the results of the URS as an approved alternative growth model or the pre-K/kindergarten portfolio growth model to generate an individual growth score as part of their final evaluation score. This allowability only applies when an LEA or public charter school administers an approved universal reading screener to pre-K students.

What legislative changes were enacted through PC 385?

PC 385 impacts the use of approved Universal Reading Screener (URS) results as an alternative growth model for pre-kindergarten teachers' individual growth scores used in evaluations.

Pursuant to PC 385, if a universal reading screener approved by the state board is administered to pre-kindergarten students, the LEA or public charter school is **required** to allow the pre-kindergarten teacher whose students were administered the URS to use the results of the URS as an approved alternative growth model or the pre-k/kindergarten portfolio growth model to generate an individual growth score as part of their final evaluation score.

Additionally, LEA and public charter schools that administer a state board approved URS to pre-K students will need to follow the AGM-URS/portfolio rostering guidance, screening windows, and administration guidelines found on the [TEAM website](#). LEAs and public charter schools are responsible for the implementation of the teachers' chosen alternative growth model.

Where can I find additional resources on the pre-K/kindergarten growth portfolio?

Visit the [TEAM website](#) for more portfolio resources. Office hours for LEA portfolio leads are held monthly, and more information can be accessed on the [Portfolio Lead Monthly Office Hours page](#) on the TEAM website. For specific portfolio questions, please contact Portfolio.Questions@tn.gov.

Alternative Growth Measure (AGM) – Universal Reading Screener (URS)

Background

The universal screening process is a multi-step process of determining student performance in relation to expected grade-level performance. This process includes the administration of universal screening assessments and the collection of additional data to understand student performance and support the data-based decision-making process regarding the instructional needs of individual students. Pursuant to [State Board Rule 0520-02-01-.03\(1\)](#) and [State Board of Education Policy 5.201](#), districts and public charter schools may use a URS established by [Tenn. Code Ann. § 49-1-905](#) as an approved AGM for pre-K-2 teachers.

In districts that selected AGM as their student growth model, pre-K teachers who are the teacher of record for four-year-old students will be required to implement a URS. If a four-year-old student has a language or physical barrier to using the approved URS options, an approved “alternative tool” may be utilized. Data collection from every four-year-old pre-K student, with and without a disability, is required. For the URS to produce a growth score for a teacher, at least six students must have data for the fall and spring administration of the URS as described below. Implementing teachers who have fewer than six students with complete data sets from fall and spring administration will not generate an individual growth score from the URS. These teachers will have their level of effectiveness (LOE) scores calculated as non-tested teachers.

Which pre-K teachers are required to administer the Universal Reading Screener (or approved alternative tool)?

In districts that selected AGM as their student growth model, licensed pre-K teachers who are employed by the LEA, serve as the teacher of record for four-year-olds, and are staffed in TNCompass are required to implement a URS or approved alternative tool. This includes pre-K teachers in comprehensive preschool.

Which pre-K teachers are not required to administer the Universal Reading Screener (or approved alternative tool)?

In districts that selected AGM as their student growth model, pre-K teachers who teach **only** three-year-old children are not required to implement a URS or approved alternative tool.

In implementing LEAs, the URS scores gathered from URS administration will be used to generate growth scores. If a teacher in an implementing LEA has only three-year-old students or does not have at least six four-year-old students to generate a growth score, the LOE score will be calculated as a non-tested teacher.

What screeners are approved for use in pre-K?

Two State Board of Education (SBE)-approved screeners offer pre-K norms. In districts that selected URS as their alternative growth measure instead of portfolio, LEAs and public charter schools screen their four-year-old pre-K students using one of these two universal screening tools and the outlined subtests to create a composite score. The two SBE-approved screeners and assessments required to create a composite are listed below. LEAs and public charter schools screening in pre-K may choose either of the two, but LEAs and public charter schools are responsible for the following:

- **aimswebPlus:** Multiple subtests are available (see [aimswebPlus Assessment Matrix](#)), but Auditory Vocabulary, Initial Sounds, and Print Concepts subtests are required for a pre-K composite score.
- **Star Assessment Suite:** Star Early Literacy

How many times per year is the URS administered to pre-K students?

Screenings should be completed, at a minimum, two times per year. To produce a valid student growth score, the URS must be administered in the fall and spring within the department's set administration windows. Universal reading screener data are reported from the vendor to the department at the closure of each administration window. See this [Required Universal Screening Windows](#) document for more information on administration windows.

Are three-year-old students and/or five-year-olds students required to complete the URS?

No. Only four-year-old pre-K students must complete one of the URS options or an approved "alternative tool." Three-year-old and five-year-old pre-K students are not required to participate. However, they may participate if the district would like to collect data. It is important to note that only data from four-year-old children will be utilized to determine the teacher's LOE.

What accessibility supports are available to all students?

Accessibility supports are universal tools available to all students that are embedded within the testing interface or non-embedded and provided outside of the testing platform to allow accessibility. Examples of accessibility support include line trackers, color coding, noise buffers, text-to-speech, magnification, and adaptive keyboards. The accessibility supports and allowable accommodations may vary based on the universal screener tool or suite of tools. Districts should review the availability of embedded accessibility supports and allowable accommodations when selecting a screener to determine if the screener is accessible to students with physical or language barriers.

While some students may have difficulty accessing specific measures on the universal reading screeners, there may be measures or components accessible with accommodations. If a screener measure is

inaccessible to a student based on his/her disability, the student should attempt the remaining measures with appropriate accommodation(s) as needed. A composite/aggregate score will not be calculated for students who do not complete the entire battery of measures due to access limitations.

If a student is unable to engage with the regular assessment without altering the standardized administration—thereby compromising the validity and reliability of the norms—the teacher should administer an alternative assessment tool. If in doubt, educators can attempt administration, discontinuing as needed. This data about student access to standardized assessments can be a useful piece of the student data profile for future decision-making.

If the student cannot complete the regular URS assessments to create a composite score, an alternative universal screening tool should be utilized. Students who do not have a composite score on the regular URS will not contribute to a teacher's LOE (see next page for more information).

See the [TN Universal Reading Screener Administration Guidelines for Pre-Kindergarten through Grade 3](#) for additional information related to accommodations, accessibility, and alternative screening tools.

What alternative tools are acceptable for pre-K children with disabilities who are unable to complete the approved screeners due to language or physical barriers?

An “alternative tool” is a general term intended to provide educators the flexibility to identify an appropriate and accessible assessment for the student's individual needs to guide data-based instructional decisions. For pre-K, selecting an alternative tool should be purposeful and individualized to ensure the child can demonstrate their current skill level. When selecting an alternative tool, the LEA can use assessments or tools aligned to the state universal screening assessments. A few options for the LEA to consider include:

- data collected from pre-literacy supplemental programs and materials,
- language sample,
- data compiled from functional assessment checklists, individualized for student needs,
- developmental screener,
- early phonological/phonemic awareness tools, and/or
- performance-based screening of pre-literacy skills using curriculum materials, assistive technology, and/or routines or structures familiar to the student.

How do I report the results of my pre-K students' data using an alternative tool?

Pre-kindergarten students who participate in an alternative tool do not have to have their data reported to the department.

How are students who are assessed with the alternative tool calculated in a teacher's LOE?

Students who are assessed using the alternative tool are not included in the calculation of a teacher's LOE. However, the assessment data should still be used to guide instructional planning and support the individual needs of each student.

How should pre-K teachers prepare to administer the URS?

In preparing for the administration of the selected URS, LEAs and public charter schools should consider each of the following:

- Have testing administrators been established as outlined by the department, and have all appropriate trainings for screening administration been completed according to vendor guidelines?
- Has a schedule for completion of all required measures of the selected universal reading screener for all students been created, and has consideration been given to the time required to complete each measure?
- Have any necessary materials, including paper copies or technological needs (i.e., computers), been considered and provided for each student testing?
- Have setting considerations been explored to ensure students are testing in a safe, quiet, and conducive environment?
- Have any alternative URS measures or accommodation, as well as a plan for how these will be administered, been determined?

Who administers the URS to pre-K students?

To ensure test security and fidelity of URS administration, as well as comparability across different screeners, educators are no longer allowed to administer screeners to their own students, for whom they are considered the "teacher of record." LEAs are encouraged to train teams of educators and school personnel to assess students. Other educators may be trained to administer the reading screener to students. These educators can be English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, related arts teachers, teachers who are not the "teacher of record," educational assistants, instructional support staff (i.e., school psychologists, guidance counselors, speech and language teachers, etc.), and administrators. The teacher of record may be present during screening administration.

How are pre-K educators' individual growth scores calculated?

For the URS to produce a growth score for a teacher, at least six students must have data for the fall and spring administration of the URS as described below. Implementing teachers who have fewer than six students with complete data sets from fall and spring administration will not generate an individual growth

score from the URS. These teachers will have their LOE scores calculated as non-tested teachers. Please see the [TEAM website](#) for additional information on LOE generation.

Pre-K teachers receiving an individual growth score (have LOE calculated as tested teacher) must meet all the following requirements:

- serve as the teacher of record in EIS,
- administer all required subtests by one of the three State Board-approved vendors with pre-K norms to produce composite scores,
- have at least six four-year-old students with valid data in the fall and spring, and
- assess within the department's determined URS administration window.

Pre-K teachers NOT receiving an individual growth score (have LOE calculated as non-tested teacher) include:

- teachers who are not the teacher of record in EIS,
- teachers who have fewer than six four-year-old students who can access the URS without the use of an "alternative tool," or
- teachers who teach **only** three-year-olds.

What legislative changes were enacted through PC 385?

PC 385 impacts the use of approved URS results as an alternative growth model for pre-kindergarten teachers' individual growth scores used in evaluations.

Pursuant to PC 385, if a universal reading screener approved by the state board is administered to pre-kindergarten students, the LEA or public charter school is **required** to allow the pre-kindergarten teacher whose student were administered the URS to use the results of the URS as an approved alternative growth model or the pre-k/kindergarten portfolio growth model to generate an individual growth score as part of their final evaluation score.

This **only** applies when an LEA or public charter school administers an approved **universal reading screener** to Pre-K students.

Additionally, LEA and public charter schools that administer a state board-approved URS to pre-K students will need to follow the AGM-URS/portfolio rostering guidance, screening windows, and administration guidelines found on the [TEAM website](#). LEAs and public charter schools are responsible for the implementation of the teachers' chosen alternative growth model.

If a school administers a URS to pre-K students, can an individual pre-K teacher still select portfolio growth model?

Yes, if a universal reading screener approved by the state board is administered to pre-kindergarten students, the LEA or public charter school is **required** to allow the pre-kindergarten teacher to choose the results of the URS as an approved alternative growth model or the pre-k/kindergarten portfolio growth model to generate an individual growth score as part of their final evaluation score.

Will the department pay for pre-K students to complete the URS?

LEAs and public charter schools screening in pre-K may choose either of the two approved universal screening tools, but LEAs and public charter schools are responsible for contracting and funding the selection.

Will training be available for pre-K teachers related to URS implementation?

More information on TN-URS implementation (aimswEBPlus), as well as professional learning opportunities, can be found at the [aimswEBPlus website](#). If using an SBE-approved screener other than aimswEBPlus, please consult with your district leadership about implementation support. For general questions about URS implementation, please contact TN.UniversalScreener@tn.gov.

Where can I find additional resources on the URS (or approved alternative)?

More information on AGM, as well as URS specific resources, can be found on the [Alternative Growth Measure page](#) on the TEAM website.. For specific AGM/URS questions, please contact TEAM.Questions@tn.gov.

Contacts

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