

## Opting Out of Annual Assessments October 2020

### What is the Purpose of Annual Assessments?

Annual assessments are critical to ensure that all students are making strong academic progress. In Tennessee, one measure of student, school, and district academics is through the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), which are tests aligned with our state's academic standards, outlining what students are expected to know, guiding educators as they 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 to 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.

### May parents opt their students out of testing?

No, state and federal law 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. Therefore, school districts are not authorized to adopt policies allowing these actions.

With the exception of students impacted by COVID-19 as described below, school districts must 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.

### What considerations may be made for students impacted by COVID-19?

#### Students Impacted Medically by COVID-19

A student who tests positive for COVID-19 and is unable to return to school to test may be exempt from testing following appropriate medical exemption documentation.

#### Supporting Students with Existing Health Conditions

Students with health conditions, such as those who may be immunocompromised, may also qualify for a medical exemption, if the school building testing coordinator or district testing coordinator is unable to accommodate the testing environment needed to ensure student safety. Students with other diagnoses whose needs can be addressed with appropriate supports throughout the school year should have a plan that includes the student's needs during testing as well. Districts should follow accommodations available to students as outlined in these plans, as long as they do not compromise test security or the validity of the assessment.

#### Guidance for Classrooms and Schools Impacted by Quarantine

In the case of a student, set of students, or school impacted by a quarantine due to COVID-19 in advance of testing, school districts are strongly encouraged to schedule make-up testing opportunities that would be able to be administered at a date when students could safely return to school. School districts typically schedule make-up opportunities shortly after their previously communicated test dates but this Fall may choose to offer additional make-up testing opportunities for students later if they can plan with enough advance notice to ensure test availability.