



PUBLIC SCHOOLS OF NORTH CAROLINA

STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION | Eric C. Davis, Chairman

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TO Superintendents
Charter School Leaders

FROM Eric C. Davis *ecD*

DATE November 13, 2020

2020-21 TESTING & ACCOUNTABILITY UPDATE

In a letter dated September 3, 2020, U.S. Department of Education Secretary Betsy DeVos intentions informed the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) that the federal government did not intend to waive the required statewide assessments, including general assessments and alternate assessments, or the accountability reports for the 2020–21 school year. Unless there is a change in that direction, we are required to move forward with testing and accountability despite the difficulties and challenges that are created by the COVID-19 pandemic. These assessments are also required by state law, and there has been no indication the North Carolina General Assembly will waive or modify the law.

TEST ADMINISTRATIONS FALL 2020

With many students fully engaged in remote learning due to the COVID-19 pandemic, we have considered allowing remote administrations of required statewide assessments. However, remote administrations may compromise the validity and reliability of the test data. Additionally, inconsistent access to the test and the administration procedures would yield inequities in the students' experiences. These differences could skew any outcomes, misrepresenting student performance, achievement, and growth analyses. Also, results may not be valid for Read to Achieve, School Performance Grades, EVAAS growth analyses, and the *Every Student Succeeds Act*. For these reasons, remote test administrations unfortunately are not feasible.

Testing validity and reliability are essential to fulfilling our legal and pedagogical obligations. Therefore, the Board is confirming that with federal and state requirements for valid and reliable assessments, the following assessments scheduled for fall 2020 and the fall semester are to be conducted, with or without accommodations as required, at school or at a school-sanctioned site with all safety and testing protocols in place:

- End-of-Course Tests for NC Math 1, NC Math 3, English II and biology
- CTE State Assessments
- Read to Achieve Alternative Assessment
- Read to Achieve Portfolio
- Beginning of Grade 3 Reading Test

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AN EQUAL OPPORTUNITY/AFFIRMATIVE ACTION EMPLOYER

We know it may be difficult to test all students within the last five days of a semester as required by G.S. §115C-174.12 (a) (4) while also maintaining mandated social distancing. Providing students with equal educational opportunities, including equal opportunities to demonstrate their knowledge, is always a priority; however, during the COVID-19 pandemic, it has become more important to ensure the health and safety of our students, teachers, families and communities.

With that in mind, please note the following regarding the administration of the end-of-course assessments in the fall 2020 semester:

- To ensure adherence to COVID-19 guidelines for safe environments, particularly social distancing, public school units that need additional days to administer the end-of-course assessments or the Career and Technical Educational (CTE) State Assessments during the last five days of the semester are to use the Testing Outside the Window process. In this process, PSUs must document the reason for testing outside the window and submit the reasons as required by Accountability Services and the CTE Division. Public school unit testing and accountability directors are familiar with this process, and if needed, may consult their Regional Accountability Coordinator for assistance. Remember, academic growth is best determined by results from tests administered as close to the intended testing window as possible. Please bear that fact in mind when scheduling tests this fall. The testing window closes on July 6, 2021.
- Locations other than a student's assigned school that are approved by a public school unit's leadership may be utilized to achieve social distancing. All testing protocols and requirements must be in place.
- Students who do not participate in these required tests in fall 2020 may take these tests in the spring 2021 testing window or in the summer program testing window. Participation in the summer program must be approved by the local board of education.
- Schools must still count a student's end-of-course or CTE State Assessment score for at least 20% of the student's final grade. In determining the 0–100 scale for inclusion in the student's final grade, a public school unit may use the state-provided default, or it may use its own derived 0–100 scale.

The five day or ten-day testing window does not apply to the following assessments:

- Beginning of Grade 3 Reading Tests, the Read to Achieve Alternate, and the Read to Achieve Portfolio: Students in remote learning settings may participate when they return to school, whenever that may be, or as a local decision, the students may attend school for the purpose of taking these tests.
- ACT make-ups from spring 2020, and the Career and College Readiness Alternate Assessment (CCRAA) at Grade 11 make-ups from spring 2020: Scheduled in the coming

weeks per ACT test dates that cannot be amended; however, the Testing Outside the Window process is available for the CCRAA.

- PreACT and WorkKeys: Testing windows are set and implemented by ACT. All ACT testing must occur in school or in a school-sanctioned site with all safety protocols in place

We are aware that there may be some concerns about students attending school to take a test. However, it is important for educators to know students' performance on the grade level content standards, particularly when planning for their learning needs. Test scores may be considered when making decisions on grading and classifying students. Though a test score should not be the only information considered, it may be useful as educators evaluate what is best for students. Participating in testing gives students the opportunity to show what they know and can do. Depriving students of this opportunity will create and compound future educational inequities. Your Regional Accountability Coordinators will provide sample parent letters to use when communicating to parents the context on why testing is proceeding during this pandemic.

Lastly, with respect to testing, there is the question of whether these test results will be used for calculating School Performance Grades and the associated school accountability determinations as required by state and federal laws. As of this date, the US Department of Education has not waived accountability reports and determinations for the 2020–21 school year. This memo only addresses test administrations in fall 2020. We do not know what will happen in the coming months. As more information becomes available and if the situation changes, we will provide updates to what is required and how the requirements will be met for spring 2021.

ECD/dts

c: Mark Johnson, Superintendent of Public Instruction
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State Board of Education Members