



NORTH CAROLINA DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION

Maurice "Mo" Green, Superintendent of Public Instruction

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TO LEA Superintendents
Charter School Directors

FROM Michael Maher, Chief Accountability Officer *MM*
Division of Accountability and Research

Tammy Howard, Senior Director *TH*
Office of Accountability and Testing

Kinge Mbella, Assistant Director *KM*
Office of Accountability and Testing

2025–26 ANNUAL TESTING PROGRAM AND ACCOUNTABILITY REQUIREMENTS

In preparation for the 2025–26 school year, this memo provides affirmation and clarification of processes, procedures, and requirements for the Annual Testing Program and the accountability system. This memo has two sections: (1) *Updates* and (2) *Standard Operating Procedures and Information*.

Updates

End-of-Grade (EOG) and End-of-Course (EOC) Tests Retesting

Information on retest opportunities and the use of retests scores in growth analyses will be provided in a separate memo. Additional time is needed to ensure thorough discussion and input. It is anticipated this information will be shared no later than mid-August.

Online Testing Contingency Plan

If the NCTest platform is interrupted, whether due to a statewide outage or a local issue, the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) will address statewide issues and provide support for local issues as appropriate. For all interruptions, schools are encouraged to keep students in the testing setting and maintain a secure environment for up to 30 minutes; however, public school units (PSUs) may also set a reasonable, locally determined wait time based on their specific circumstances.

After the thirty-minute mark, or the locally determined wait time, schools may elect to do one of the following:

1. Pause testing for the remainder of the day and resume testing the next school day, or
2. Declare a misadministration and administer the test at a later date.

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6307 Mail Service Center, Raleigh, North Carolina 27699 | (984) 236-2710

Additional information on the processes for (1) resuming a test either on the initial test day or after the initial test day, and (2) declaring a misadministration, will be provided in regional training and in the NCTest Admin Guide.

While students are waiting to resume testing, reasonable efforts should be made to ensure a secure environment. No one should discuss information found on the test or access electronic devices, including test administrators or proctors. However, at no time should students be denied access to the restroom or to food and drink. Also, when there is a test platform outage schools must ensure as part of the testing plan that students have adequate opportunity to eat lunch and travel home at their regularly scheduled time.

Test Administration Recommendations

To affirm testing protocols are followed with fidelity and to ensure reported test scores accurately reflect student achievement and support state and local accountability measures, the NCDPI highly recommends the following test administration best practices:

- When possible, a teacher who is not exposed to the test subject content should be assigned to administer EOG and EOC tests.
- When the teacher of record is administering the test, a second person serving as a proctor should be present during the test session.
- If proctors in each test session are not doable, roving proctors should be used to monitor test sessions.

Test Administration Availability

To maintain test security, all state tests including NC Check-Ins 2.0 administrations during the school week must launch before 5:00 p.m. and be completed by 7:00 p.m. PSUs must plan administrations accordingly to ensure all students have completed testing by 7:00 p.m. Tests not completed by 7:00 p.m. will not be saved in NCTest, will be declared a misadministration, and the student(s) will need to take the test again. The only exception is for students with the *Multiple Testing Session* accommodation who will be permitted to pause the test and resume the next day. Test administrators will follow guidance provided in test administration guides to pause and resume the test the next day.

State tests and NC Check-Ins 2.0 are not available for administration on Saturdays or Sundays.

For The ACT, WIDA, and other vendor-provided assessments, refer to the specific vendor requirements for testing windows and timing.

Credit by Demonstrated Mastery (CDM) and Flexible Testing Window Changes

To enhance test security and streamline administration windows, the NCDPI is providing parallel windows for CDM and flexible testing. Flexible testing and CDM testing will be available:

- July (last 10 days of the month),
- September and October (last 5 school days of each month),
- March (last 10 school days of the month), and
- a school's fall and spring EOC testing windows.

PSUs will submit requests to administer any test, regardless of whether it is for CDM or flexible testing in NCTest Admin. The regional accountability offices will provide support and training for the testing window changes.

Student Access Codes for Online Testing Platform

PSUs will utilize student access codes when administering the following tests:

- College and Career Readiness Alternate Assessments,
- EOG tests,
- EOC tests, and
- Read to Achieve tests (beginning spring 2026)
- NC Check-Ins 2.0

Test administrators and test coordinators are not permitted to log students in to these tests using their log-in credentials. Student access codes can only be used once; therefore, test administrators are permitted to log students into a test only when the student is inadvertently logged out or after a break when the student has the *Multiple Testing Session* accommodation.

Performance Considerations for Testing with iOS Devices

NCTest does not get automatic notification of system updates for iOS devices (iPad app. and secure browser for Macs). These devices are supported for NCTest; however, NCTest performance may be affected by software updates released during testing.

Transition to Progressive Web Application on Chromebook Devices

NCTest will transition from the NCTest Chrome app. to a Progressive Web Application (PWA) for NCTest on Chromebooks. The PWA requires Chromebook devices to be managed by the PSU; non-managed Chromebooks cannot be used for testing. It is a local decision to manage student-owned Chromebooks.

Entering Grade 9 Entry Dates in the NC Student Information System (NCSIS)

Grade 9 entry dates must be added for all high school students in the NCSIS. Most students have the grade 9 entry date assigned by the NCSIS automatically. Students who enroll in PSUs where a grade 9 entry date has not been established must enter the grade 9 entry date by the end of the school year the student initially enrolled. Guidance on how to enter a grade 9 entry date is available in training materials from the NCSIS.

Students without grade 9 entry dates are identified as part of the Cohort Graduation Rate documentation and processing. Additional details will be provided during training to support data entry of new and past records without grade 9 entry dates.

As a reminder, once the grade 9 entry date is established in the NCSIS and collected by the Office of Accountability and Testing, a data correction must be submitted if the date entered was incorrect.

Change to First Year in U.S. Schools Determinations for English Learners beginning in 2025–26

Beginning with the 2025–26 school year, an English Learners' first year in U.S. schools will be determined by the entry date established in the NCSIS. Once the entry date of the first year in U.S. schools is determined, students will be tracked throughout the first calendar year for the purposes of testing and accountability. The tracking of the first year in U.S. schools can also be used by PSUs when determining the application of policies related to English learners, including when the EOC assessment as 20% of a student's final grade must be applied.

Enhanced ACT

The ACT composite score will be based on the scores from only three section tests - English, Math and Reading (EMR). The science test score will not be included in the calculation of the composite score, but it will be reported as an individual subject test.

Additional information about upcoming ACT changes will be shared during regional training.

Key Dates

Accountability End-of-Year Date

The end of the year for accountability data collection is July 6, 2026.

NC Education: Help Desk and Availability

NC Education is not available from December 24, 2025, through January 2, 2026.

To reset the NC Education testing management platform for the 2026–27 school year, the NCTest and NC Admin systems will not be available July 7–17, 2026. During this time, it will not be possible to administer any online or paper state-designated tests, including NC Check-Ins 2.0, or to review reports.

Standard Operating Procedures and Information

Secure Test Materials

PSUs must continue to review test security policies and procedures to ensure they adhere to all test security and copyright requirements. Copying, reproducing, or paraphrasing test materials for instructional activities including as resource materials for study guides, or for professional development is a breach of test security and is a violation of federal copyright laws, 16 N.C. Admin. Code 06D .0311–The Testing Code of Ethics, and State Board of Education policy.

Additionally, students and staff are not permitted to share or discuss test questions with other students or staff during and/or after testing. The only time students or staff can discuss test questions is if they suspect a potential security breach.

Without exception, if there is any doubt about the misuse or unauthorized disclosure of test questions and associated secure test materials, the school must immediately contact the PSU test coordinator who will advise next steps per test security guidance. PSUs should reference the *North Carolina Test Coordinator's Policies and Procedures Handbook* or the *Testing Security Protocol and Procedures for School Personnel* guide for additional information about test security and system requirements.

Requests for Testing Exceptions Based on Significant Medical Emergencies and/or Conditions

There may be rare instances in which a student is unable to participate in a state assessment during the testing window, including makeup dates, because of a significant medical emergency and/or condition. Examples include, but are not limited to, circumstances involving students who are (1) in the final stages of a terminal or degenerative illness, (2) comatose, or (3) receiving extensive short-term medical treatment due to a medical emergency. Under these circumstances, a school may request a testing exception for the student from the Office of Accountability and Testing. If a medical exception is granted, the student remains enrolled in the school during the test window; however, the student does not take the test(s), and the student is not included when calculating participation rates.

When submitting medical exception requests, it is important to remember that the medical exception committee provides a decision about the removal of the student's data from the school's denominator (given the supporting documentation and the details of the request). The school should make the decision to test a student based on the medical condition or emergency, not on approval of a medical exception request. Districts and schools should not wait for a medical exception decision before determining to test a student; however, if the student is not tested and the medical exception is denied, the student will be included in the participation calculation. PSUs should reference the *North Carolina Test Coordinator's Policies and Procedures Handbook* for additional information about Medical Exception Requests.

Adherence to the 10/20 Day Rule

Per 16 N.C. Admin Code 06D. 0309, "PSU students may drop a course with an EOC within the first 10 days of enrollment in a semester block schedule or within the first 20 days of enrollment in a yearlong traditional schedule. Students who are enrolled for credit after the 10 or 20 days shall not drop a course with a required EOC and shall participate in the EOC administration at the completion of the course." Exceptions to the 10/20 day rule are allowed when it is in the best interest of the student to be removed from a course requiring an EOC test. These cases should be evaluated individually, and consideration should be given to ensure the accountability of the school is not compromised. PSUs should reference the *North Carolina Test Coordinator's Policies*

and Procedures Handbook for additional information about exceptions to adherence to the 10/20 Day Rule.

English II End-of-Course Delayed Scoring

English II EOC tests include multiple-choice, technology-enhanced, and student-written constructed response questions. The constructed response questions are hand scored, and the time required to send the answers to the vendor and to complete the scoring process has an impact on the timeline for score return. Schools are advised to administer the English II EOC test as early in the test window as possible to facilitate optimal return of the scores.

For English II EOC testing, the vendor begins scoring the first business day after test records are received and returns the scored test records electronically to the NCDPI within approximately six business days of starting the scoring process. An additional day is required for processing the files from the scoring vendor to the NCDPI. Therefore, test coordinators should allow approximately seven business days to receive test records. Please note that scoring will pause Monday, December 22, 2025, and resume Monday, January 5, 2026.

Please share the annual testing updates information found in this memo locally. If you have any questions regarding this information, please contact your regional accountability office.

MM:TLH:KM

c: Maurice Green, State Superintendent
Maria Pitre-Martin, Deputy State Superintendent
Stacey Wilson-Norman, Chief Academic Officer, Division of Academics
Derrick Jordan, Chief Operations Officer, Division of Operations
Monique Felder, Deputy Chief Academic Officer, Office of District and School Support Services
Carol Ann Hudgens, Senior Director, Office of Exceptional Children
Ashley Baquero, Director, Office of Charter Schools
Curtis Sonneman, Section Chief, Analysis and Reporting
Shannon Jordan, Section Chief, Testing Policy and Operations
Iris Irving, Section Chief, Test Development
Regional Accountability Coordinators
Test Coordinators