



Bedford County Department of Education

500 Madison Street
Shelbyville, Tennessee 37160-3391
Telephone: 931-684-3284 Fax: 931-684-3289

August 1, 2016

Dear Parent/Guardian,

As the start of a new school year approaches, I know you have many questions, specifically around assessments, and I'm pleased to share exciting updates with you today. Maximizing instructional time and reducing testing is a priority for our state, and the changes to assessments in the 2016-17 school year reflect these priorities.

Questar, a national leader in large-scale assessment, will be the primary vendor for the 2016-17 Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP). Students, teachers, and parents deserve a better testing experience in Tennessee, and we are looking forward to working with Questar and the state department of education to measure student learning in a meaningful way and ensure students are on track.

TCAP has been the state's testing program since 1988, and it includes state assessments in math, English language arts, social studies, and science. As the state has transitioned to better academic standards in math and English language arts over the past several years, those tests have become more fully aligned to what educators are teaching, and they now include rigorous questions that measure students' critical thinking, writing, and problem solving skills.

Last year's math and English language arts assessments were part of the TCAP umbrella, and in 2016-17, these tests will serve the same goal: to ensure that students are on track for the next step in their educational path. As in previous years, students in Tennessee will continue to take TCAP, but it will be shorter this year. This improved test measures how well your child has mastered the skills and content at his or her grade level.

Last year, students across the state had their testing experience interrupted due to difficulties with the previous vendor. This year's assessment, which has been designed and reviewed in partnership with Tennessee educators, keeps the same goals of focusing on real-world skills, including critical thinking, writing, and problem solving, but has greatly improved logistics and a reduction in testing time. TCAP tests will have a variety of questions ranging from traditional multiple-choice questions to ones that require students to explain their answers, show their work, and compose well-organized essays.

With this assessment, you will receive a detailed parent report, where each subject will be broken down into categories of skills to show where a student is doing well or needs some extra help. Teachers and parents can use this information to provide more focused supports or to find opportunities for advanced coursework, depending on the student's needs. We are committed to the success of your child, and TCAP is one way that helps to ensure that every child is on the path to success.

Here are some specific details that have been shared with us by the state:

- **Overall, students will spend approximately 30 percent less time taking state tests this year.** For the typical third grader, this year's state assessment will be three and a half hours shorter than last year. For a typical 11th grader, their End of Course assessments will be three hours and 45 minutes shorter than last year's EOCs. For our English language arts assessments, the total overall time has been reduced by about 30 percent for all our students. Our social studies assessment for grades 3-8 is two-thirds shorter than it was last year.
- **Students will take the state assessment in one window at the end of the year.** In other words, Part I will be eliminated in all subjects. While the state assessment will still include a writing component, it will be given a single administration window at the end of the school year. This ensures teachers have time to cover all of their content and alleviates numerous logistical challenges.
- **In addition, we will phase in online tests over multiple years** to ensure that the state, the vendor, our district, and our schools are ready. For the upcoming school year, the state assessment for grades 3–8 will be administered via paper and pencil. However, the department will work closely with Questar to provide an online option for high school End of Course exams if both our schools and the testing platform demonstrate early proof of successful online administration.
- **In the coming school year, the state will administer a social studies field test for students in grades 3–8.** Field tests are not scored for a grade and do *not* factor into educators' evaluations. Instead, field testing is a process used to ensure that, for future tests, students are only scored on questions that are valid and appropriate for them to take.
- **However, U.S. history, an End of Course exam for high school students, will continue as planned for the 2016-17 school year—**although it will be shorter than last year's test and it will be given in a single administration window. Similar to other subjects, the grades 3–8 social studies assessment will be given in only one part when the operational test resumes in the 2017-18 school year.

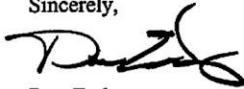
As we begin the new school year, it is important to remember that the results from these tests are just one piece of the overall puzzle. Results from TCAP are meant to be one of several measures that illustrate how a student is progressing. Test scores should be used along with in-class performance; report card grades; teacher feedback; and what a parent, teacher, and even a student notices about his or her growth to form a fuller picture of a student's achievement. Both the Tennessee Department of Education and our district are working to ensure that tests provide meaningful information for teachers, student, and parents and that they have an appropriate, balanced role in our schools.

More information about the tests, as well as practice materials, will be available in the coming weeks. I encourage you and your child to continually visit our district website, as well as tn.gov/education, both of which will be frequently updated as new information is available.

In Bedford County Schools, our goal is for every student to achieve his or her full potential. The end-of-year state assessment is just one way that we are able to better understand if we are meeting that goal. We are confident that with the quality instruction delivered by our dedicated educators, and your support, our students can meet and exceed these expectations.

Thank you for all you do to partner with us in your child's education.

Sincerely,



Don Embry
Superintendent of Schools