

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

July 14, 2016

CONTACT: Ashley Ball

OFFICE: (615) 532-6260

Tennessee Department of Education Reduces Testing Time by 30 Percent

Part I eliminated for all TCAP tests; new test restructured for easier scheduling while still ensuring all students on track for success in college and career

NASHVILLE—Tennessee Education Commissioner Candice McQueen announced significant changes to state assessments today that respond to feedback from educators, parents, and students—including eliminating Part I in all subjects, restructuring the test to better fit within the school day and year, and reducing overall testing time. The changes come as the department finalizes its contract with Questar, the primary vendor for the 2016-17 Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP).

“We have learned a tremendous amount from our testing experience this past year, and we want to make the right adjustments to create a positive, balanced culture around testing in Tennessee’s classrooms,” McQueen said. “These adjustments will give educators a greater ability to maximize rich, well-rounded instruction for all our students. We are still working toward the same goal of providing aligned, rigorous assessments to measure what our students know and can do, but now we have a smarter logistical approach and a strong partnership with Questar to achieve this goal.”

Overall, testing time has been reduced by nearly a third. The exact reductions vary by grade. In grades 3-8, students will have tests that are a total of 200-210 minutes shorter. As an example, for a typical third grader, the 2016-17 TCAP assessments will be shorter by three and a half hours compared to last year. In high school, most individual End of Course assessments have been shortened by 40-120 minutes. For a typical eleventh grader, this would mean the 2016-17 TCAP End of Course assessments will be shorter in total by 225 minutes—or three hours and 45 minutes—compared to last year.

One assessment window at the end of the school year

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 higher academic standards in math and English language arts over the past several years, those tests have become better aligned to what educators are teaching. The assessments now include rigorous questions that measure students’ writing, critical thinking, and problem solving skills.

The 2016-17 TCAP will be given in one assessment window at the end of the school year, and the tests for the four subjects have been divided into shorter subparts. This change is in response to feedback from district and school administrators, who expressed some difficulty with fitting the longer sections into the regular school day. The new timing is outlined on [the department’s website](#). These reductions and adjustments reflect Commissioner McQueen’s desire to reduce testing and streamline administration while still providing students with ample opportunity to do their best work. The specific changes to each subject area are included in the department’s [fact sheet](#).

In addition, the 2016-17 social studies test in grades 3-8 will be a field test. Field tests are not reportable and do not factor into students’ grades or educators’ evaluations, and they will provide the department with

information to develop an assessment for the 2017-18 school year. There will also be a separate field test for the English and U.S. history writing prompts. One-third to one-half of students will participate in the field test each year on a rotating basis. Based on educator feedback, the department is administering these writing field tests at a separate time to address concerns about students' stamina to complete two writing prompts during the main testing window.

Tennessee teachers already have significant input in the test development process as they review and approve every TCAP question, including those that will be on the 2016-17 assessment. Starting this fall, Tennessee teachers will also be engaged in developing and writing questions for future TCAP administrations.

Contract finalized with new vendor

As part of today's announcements, Commissioner McQueen shared that the department has fully executed a two-year contract with Questar, a national leader in large-scale assessments, to administer the 2016-17 TCAP. Questar has experience developing a statewide test on a similar expedited timeframe as well as with administering it at a scale even larger than Tennessee's.

Last week, [the department announced](#) it intended to award the contract to Questar. As part of that announcement, Commissioner McQueen also announced that the department would phase in online testing over the next three years, with a paper option always available for the youngest students. In the 2016-17 school year, all testing in grades 3-8 will be done on paper. High schools will have the option to test online if they and Questar show early readiness for online administration, but districts can choose paper for their high school students if they prefer.

As part of its contract with Questar, the department has made a number of improvements to testing timelines, including working with the vendor to expedite the overall scoring process so the assessment can be administered in one window and ultimately, results can be delivered to schools and families more quickly.

Resources for schools, educators, and families

Following the execution of the contract, the department immediately began to finalize resources to familiarize students, parents, and teachers with the 2016-17 TCAP.

The assessments are designed so that the best test preparation is strong teaching and learning every day. Questions on the 2016-17 test will be similar to those students saw last year. To help students become familiar with the test format in advance, this fall students and teachers will have access to sample test questions. Practice tests will also be available in EdTools, an online platform for educators and district leaders, in August.

The department is also finalizing test blueprints, which map out exactly what standards will be covered on the test, and expects to release these by the end of July. In addition, the department is also working on guides for families and educators, which will be shared with district leaders and on the department website within the month.

To help address questions about today's announcements and next year's test, the department has prepared a Q&A document that can be accessed [here](#) and will be updated as more details become available.

For more information, contact Ashley Ball at (615) 532-6260 or Ashley.M.Ball@tn.gov.