

Testing opt-out/Refusal guide for TENNESSEE

Form completed by Peggy Robertson

Contact information (email) writepeg@juno.com

List of Assessments

Constructed Response Assessment:

“The Constructed Response Assessment will focus only on math content for the 2012-13 school year. All students in third through eighth grade will take three different assessments.”

<http://www.tn.gov/education/assessment/ConstructedResponseAssessment.shtml>

TCAP:

“The Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program, or TCAP, is a set of statewide assessments given in Tennessee to measure students' skills and progress. Students in grades 3-8 take the Achievement Test, and high school students take End of Course exams for various subjects. The Achievement Test is a timed, multiple choice assessment that measures skills in Reading, Language Arts, Mathematics, Science and Social Studies...In addition, some schools choose to administer the Achievement Test to students in Kindergarten and Grades 1 and 2.”

http://www.tn.gov/education/assessment/doc/Grades_k2.pdf

TCAP Writing Assessment:

“The Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) Writing Assessment is undergoing major changes in the 2012 -13 school year. Several aspects of the test are being changed to meet the expectations of the new Common Core Standards. All students in fifth, eighth and eleventh grades will take the TCAP Writing Assessment.”

<http://www.tn.gov/education/assessment/writing.shtml>

End of Course Exams

“In the new High School Transition Policy, the State Board stipulated that End of Course examinations will be given in English I, English II, English III, Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II, U.S. History, Biology I, Chemistry and Physics. Further, the results of these examinations will be factored into the student's grade at a percentage determined by the State Board of Education in accordance with T.C.A. §49-1-302 (2).

-The End of Course exam grade will count 20 percent of the second semester grade for the 2009-10 and the 2010-11 school years and 25 percent of the second semester grade in subsequent school years.

-Students will not be required to pass any one examination, but instead students must achieve a passing score for the course in accordance with the State Board of Education's uniform grading policy.”

<http://www.tn.gov/education/assessment/secondary.shtml>

Additional Assessments (District-Specific. Please note that this test does not include all additional assessments given across the state.)

--Discovery Education Assessments (DEA)

--DIBELS

--SAT-10

In TN, a student's performance on End of Course (EOC) exams and the TCAP account for 15-25% of his/her overall final semester grade. (For more information:

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2011/apr/08/final-grades-to-include-tcap/>,

<http://state.tn.us/sos/acts/106/pub/pc1127.pdf>)

Some districts also use TCAP/EOC scores to determine eligibility for magnet school lotteries, course-level placement, etc. If you choose to refuse testing for your children, we recommend putting your request in writing--see below for sample letter--and getting written verification from the district regarding your request. The letter from the district should clearly state that your child's grades, etc. will not be affected and include the activities your child will be participating in while others are testing (e.g., silent reading, activities in another classroom).

Special considerations for the above assessments

Regarding Refusal of the TCAP/End of Course Exams:

A student's grade, ability to enter a magnet school lottery, course-level placement, etc. may be negatively affected if he/she refuses to take the TCAP or EOC exams. (See link for law on this issue: <http://state.tn.us/sos/acts/106/pub/pc1127.pdf>.) If you choose to refuse testing for your children, we recommend putting your request in writing and getting written verification from school, district, and/or state administrators that your child's grades, etc. will not be affected. Also have them document what your child will be allowed to do while others are testing.

Regarding Refusal of the TCAP Writing Assessment:

It is our understanding that, for the 2013-2014 school year, the TCAP Writing Assessment is not factored into district or school level accountability, nor is it factored into teacher value-added scores, as stated in the two following quotes:

--"For the next two years, the Writing Assessment will have no effect upon district or school level accountability and will not be factored into teacher value-added scores, giving teachers and students a chance to learn and prepare for new standards and expectations in a low-stakes manner." http://tncore.org/english_language_arts/writing_test.aspx

--Q: "Will the writing test be linked to any kind of accountability, and will the data be reported?"

A: "Under our No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver, the writing test will no longer be factored into accountability for schools or districts (as it has been in the past for RLA in grades 5, 8, and 11), nor will it factor into teacher value-added data. However, data from writing test scores will still appear on the TDOE Report Card. The TDOE Data and Communications division will be

revising the state report card for the 2012-13 academic year; while it is too early to know how exactly the new format will look, it is likely that average writing scores (as determined by the state rubric) will continue to be reported by grade level and subpopulation.”

<http://tncore.org/sites/www/Uploads/Writing%20Assessment%20FAQ.pdf>

It is also our understanding that TCAP Writing Assessment is not factored into the report card at this time. While we cannot locate a direct quote to confirm this, we do have input from sources who state that it is NOT included. We will update the guide as we receive further information.

Procedures for opt-out/refusal

Refusing the CRA:

It is our understanding that the Constructed Response Assessment for math does NOT count as part of the student report card and is simply practice for the upcoming PARCC/Common Core testing that will formally begin in 2014-2015.

Refusing Internet/District Network in order to Refuse Online Assessments:

If your district allows you to opt out of Internet access for your children, you may refuse to allow your child access to the Internet, therefore, in our opinion, prohibiting your child from taking any online computerized assessments. (Please note that PARCC testing will replace the TCAP in 2014-2015 and it is to be given on computer/online only.) For example, the Metro Nashville Public Schools “Technology Opt-Out Form” states:

“I have read the MNPS Technology Acceptable Use Policy. I understand that the Internet is a worldwide group of computer networks and that MNPS does not control the content available on, or through these Internet sites. I understand that MNPS will undertake good faith efforts to filter objectionable material available on sites that can be accessed by MNPS students but that filtering efforts may not completely block objectionable content. Therefore, I am restricting my child’s access to the District’s network and internet. MNPS does not have my permission to give network and Internet access to my child. Failure to complete and sign the technology opt-out form will serve as an indication that your child has permission to access the District’s internet and network. (<http://www.mnps.org/AssetFactory.aspx?did=48746>)

To find your district's Internet Opt Out Form, contact the district office or do an Internet search.

Refusing Testing Based on Medical Exemption:

The state of TN allows medical exemption from the TCAP. (Here is a link for the form: http://www.tn.gov/education/assessment/doc/Med_Exemption_Form.pdf. The form is located on this link: http://www.tn.gov/education/assessment/tools_resources.shtml.) It appears that this exemption may apply to medical emergencies only, but the requirements for exemption are not clear; therefore this may be an avenue for those parents who have children with anxiety associated with standardized testing

Refusing Additional Assessments:

This is not a legal document. It is for informational purposes only.

Template revised: 6.13.13

SAT-10 (K-2)

The Stanford-10 (SAT-10) assessment for K-2 is not mandated by the state of TN, but is required by many school districts across the state. As of 6/30/13, a child's grade is not affected by SAT-10 scores. Please see below for a sample SAT-10 opt out letter.

DIBELS (K-6)

Each district is required to provide a reading “screener” and some districts are using DIBELS for this purpose. It is our understanding that there are no high-stakes for students attached to DIBELS testing, therefore, you should be able to refuse the DIBELS (or other reading screener) for your child without it counting against his/her grade/s.

DEA-Discovery Education Assessment:

The DEA is not mandated by the TN Department of Education, but is used by some districts across the state--including Metro Nashville Public Schools (MNPS). According to MNPS, “Discovery Education Assessments are designed to predict student performance on the state tests and provide detailed feedback about student performance. The DEA Predictive Benchmarks are aligned to the same state standards that are assessed on the state-mandated tests such as TCAP and End-of-Course.” (<http://www.mnps.org/Page104414.aspx#SAT10>)

It is our belief that teachers know best how to assess their students and that it is unnecessary to use a standardized test to predict student performance on the state test. In addition, it is a terrible waste of class time that could be used in actual instruction. It is our understanding that, as of 6/30/13, the state has no high stakes attached to the DEA.

In Tennessee, refusal of high-stakes standardized testing has been made more challenging because a student's performance on End of Course (EOC) exams and the TCAP account for 15-25% of his/her overall final grade. (For more information:

<http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2011/apr/08/final-grades-to-include-tcap/>,

<http://state.tn.us/sos/acts/106/pub/pc1127.pdf>) It is our belief that attaching student grades to standardized testing is indeed an effort to force students to test; therefore forcing parents, teachers, and communities to participate in a system of education that creates undue stress; narrows the curricula; and enforces a culture of teaching to the test which is void of critical, conceptual, and creative thinking. In order to return public schools to their communities, it is necessary for us to find ways to refuse to participate in a model of public education which uses our tax dollars to “standardize” our children, takes autonomy from teachers, and creates a top-down system of public education that uses numbers to sort and order students, teachers, and schools.

Urgency for opt-out/refusal

It is our belief that mass refusal of these tests will halt the harm to our children and will allow parents, students, teachers, and communities to redefine what public education means to our individual communities. One thing is for certain - the corporations that make money off of these tests will continue to devise ways to profit off of our children via public education if we do not stand up and reclaim what is ours. Refusing the test takes down their “house of cards.” Without our children's data, the current test-driven model of public education fails. Refuse the tests and

we can reclaim and improve our community public schools with the input of real educators, parents, students, and communities.

Support your public school by refusing, however you can, to participate in high-stakes testing which is used to fail students, teachers and ultimately, communities. Learning and teaching are much more than can ever be gleaned from single “snapshot” tests. Life-long learners who become productive citizens are not developed via high stakes testing - they are fostered by caring parents, teachers, and communities who believe that children cannot be forced into a proverbial box.

Sample language to include in opt-out/refusal

Sample Letter

(The below sample letter was written specifically for the SAT-10 and Metro Nashville Public Schools. It will need to be modified based on your specific district and needs. It can also be modified to refuse other standardized tests, including the TCAP, DEA, CRA, etc. Please remember to request that your child's grades, class placement, eligibility for a magnet school, etc. not be affected by refusal. Also ask that your child be allowed to read/write silently, work on homework, and/or sit in another non-testing class during testing. (Some students who have refused tests have been forced to sit in class, without access to books or schoolwork, while their classmates are testing. This is why we recommend you make your requests--and get confirmation--in writing.) Make sure that you receive written confirmation that your child will not be "punished" for the refusal. Also ask for written documentation of what your child will be allowed to do while others are testing. We recommend that you email or hand-deliver your letter to your child's principal, vice-principal/s, guidance counselor, and teacher/s.)

Dear -----,

We do not want our child, -----, to take the Stanford Achievement Test, or SAT 10. Metro Nashville Public School’s website states that, “this test is not used for any grading purposes. It is strictly an assessment used to evaluate where a student stands at a young age and to help plan the best course of action for that student’s education moving forward.” (<http://www.mnps.org/Page104414.aspx#SAT10>) However, we believe that our child’s educational progress can best be measured using her daily school work and regular classroom testing.

We believe that a single “snapshot” test, such as the SAT-10, cannot adequately assess our child’s skills. We also believe this testing creates undue stress and anxiety; narrows the curricula; and enforces a culture of teaching to the test which is void of critical, conceptual, and creative thinking. It is for these reasons that ----- will not be taking the SAT-10 this school year. I respectfully request that -----'s class grades, class placement, and eligibility to enter the magnet school lottery not be affected by refusal of this test. Please contact me at -----so we can discuss the alternative classwork ----- will be given during SAT-10 preparation and testing. After our phone call, I would also appreciate a written acknowledgment of this email and our phone call be sent to my email address, -----, or sent home with my child. Please include

verification that my child's grades, class placement, and eligibility for the magnet school lottery, etc. will not be affected by this refusal. In addition, please document which activities my child will be participating in while his/her fellow students are testing. Thank you for your time and consideration.

Respectfully,

Resources and organizations

More information on opting out, including research, letters and more can be found in our Toolkit: <http://unitedoptout.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/09/United-Opt-Out-UOO-DocumentationSept2012Final.pdf>

Additional resource:

http://tncore.org/sites/www/Uploads/2.25.13Additions/Final%20Common%20Core%20Implementation%20Plan%20with%20Timeline_2%202025.pdf

State specific watch-list

Democrats for Education Reform <http://www.dfer.org/branches/tn/>

The SCORE <http://www.tnscore.org/>

Michelle Rhee <http://www.knoxnews.com/news/2012/jan/08/michelle-rhee-education-reform-gaining-momentum/>

ALEC <http://www.alec.org/tn-should-follow-fls-lead-on-education-reform/>

Additional or miscellaneous information

We suggest demanding that National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) be used for those who feel a need to administer a standardized test. Read here to find out more:

http://www.sdkrashen.com/articles/NUT_No_Unnecessary_Testing.pdf

Additionally, if your school is participating in any field tests, these can easily be refused. Field tests are created to determine which questions to use on future tests, and, in essence, place students in a position of working for the corporations who develop these tests. We suggest refusing them.

If your child brings home homework in the form of test prep booklets, consider refusing these as well. Ask your child's teachers to provide alternative activities or creative projects in place of test preparation.