



# PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW ASSESSMENTS IN TENNESSEE

Beginning in the 2015-16 school year, TNReady is Tennessee's new and improved assessment program for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics for grades 3-11. TNReady is aligned to Tennessee's State Standards, which were adopted in 2010.

The new assessments will gauge how well students have mastered Tennessee's standards—and ultimately how ready they are for the next grade and for college and careers after graduation.

New and revised Tennessee standards in ELA and mathematics will be fully implemented during the 2017-18 school year. TNReady is designed to easily adapt over time in order to accurately measure how well students are meeting new standards. Therefore, as the state's standards in ELA and mathematics evolve, so will TNReady assessments.

## WHY NEW ASSESSMENTS?

Teachers and principals talk a lot about assessments, which are used to measure students' academic achievement. This document highlights the end-of-year summative assessments, which measure (1) student progress toward mastering state standards and (2) program and school effectiveness. For other assessments used, see box at right.

New summative assessments will address longstanding concerns that parents, educators and employers have had about current state assessments—namely that they measure the ability to memorize facts, rather than the skills to think critically and apply knowledge.

## Types of assessments

**Classroom-based:** Individual tests given by teachers as needed throughout the year to assess knowledge and skills in specific areas

**Interim:** The same test repeated at set intervals to measure student growth over time

**Summative:** End-of-year assessments administered by the state to measure student performance against a common set of standards

*This document addresses summative assessments.*

## THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

- Overview of new assessments which measure student proficiency against more rigorous standards
- Overview of accountability for students, teachers and schools
- Additional resources for parents

## What is different about the new assessments?

The new assessments for English and mathematics will enable educators to deepen their understanding of student progress from grade to grade—and just as importantly, identify any gaps in progress so they can address them **well before students enter college or the workforce.**

### ELA assessments will demonstrate:

- Whether students can read and comprehend texts of varying complexities.
- How well students can integrate information across sources to make a persuasive argument.
- The degree to which students can use context to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary.

### Math assessments will demonstrate:

- Whether students understand and can use important math ideas, including number sense, algebraic thinking, geometry, and data analysis.
- The extent to which students can use math facts and reasoning skills to solve real-world problems.
- How well students can make math arguments.



# Benefits of new assessments:



- The assessments allow students to show their work and explain their reasoning so teachers can better understand what they know and where there are gaps in learning that need to be addressed.
- Rather than focusing on what a child has memorized, the new tests ask students to apply skills like thinking, reasoning and justifying answers—showing what they know and can do.
- The tests do not lend themselves to “teaching to the test.” Since they focus on applying skills, it is the daily practice of these skills in the classroom that will serve as the best preparation for the tests.
- The new assessments will be designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English learners.

## College and Career Readiness Defined:

The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or in a high-quality certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement.

# Comparison of TNReady to Previous Tests

TNReady replaces the previous ELA and mathematics tests used in Tennessee, which were known as TCAP.

TNReady requires students to think and reason, unlike TCAP. On the following pages, you will see a few side-by-side examples of TNReady compared to TCAP. The correct answers are indicated in orange.

## EXAMPLE OF A 3RD GRADE ELA QUESTION

(Old) TCAP Example Question	(New) TNReady Example Question
<p><b>Read this summary of the speech.</b></p> <p>(1) Matt was excited to play his first hockey game. (2) He felt scared and had trouble focusing. (3) Matt asked his parents for advice. (4) His coach made him feel better, and he was able to play the game.</p> <p><b>Which sentence does not belong in the summary?</b></p> <p>A. Sentence 1</p> <p>B. Sentence 2</p> <p><b>C. Sentence 3</b></p> <p>D. Sentence 4</p>	<p>Read a passage by James Baldwin titled <i>The Landlord's Mistake</i></p> <p>Number the details in the correct order that they happened in the passage. Order from 1-6.</p> <hr/> <p>A well-dressed man asked to see Mr. Jefferson <b>4</b></p> <hr/> <p>Mr. Jefferson refused to go back to the hotel. <b>6</b></p> <hr/> <p>The landlord said he had no rooms. <b>3</b></p> <hr/> <p>Men sat by the door of a hotel in Baltimore. <b>1</b></p> <hr/> <p>A man covered in mud asked for a room at the hotel. <b>2</b></p> <hr/> <p>The landlord apologized to Mr. Jefferson <b>5</b></p>



## EXAMPLE OF A 6TH GRADE MATH QUESTION

### (Old) TCAP Example Question

Danielle had \$33.58. She spent \$19.99 of this money on art supplies. How much money should Danielle have left?

- A. \$53.57
- B. \$26.41
- C. \$14.58
- D. \$13.59

### (New) TNReady Example Question

Leo and his friend went to the Burger Shack for dinner. The menu is shown below.

Burgers & Hot Dogs	Sides
Hot dog - \$1.50	Fries - \$0.85
Chili dog - \$2.25	Onion rings - \$1.65
Hamburger - \$2.85	Fruit cup - \$2.05
Cheeseburger - \$3.15	

Leo ordered 2 cheeseburgers and 2 fruit cups. What was the total cost?

- A. \$2.20
- B. \$6.71
- C. \$9.80
- D. \$10.40

## EXAMPLE OF A HIGH SCHOOL WRITING QUESTION

### (Old) TCAP Example Question

The Supreme Court has ruled that random drug testing is constitutional for students who take part in sports or any other extracurricular activities. To further deter and prevent drug abuse, some are calling for the random drug testing of all students.

Write an essay in which either (1) you support random drug testing of all students or (2) you oppose random drug testing of all students.

Persuade the reader of your essay to accept your position. Defend your opinion with specific reasons and examples.

Students were not asked to read or use evidence from any text(s) for their essay.

### (New) TNReady Example Question

Two passages will be provided to students to write their essay.

Write an informational essay about how technology is aiding investigators who are searching for missing and stolen works of art and documents. Your essay must be based upon ideas, concepts and information that can be determined through analysis of the two passages.

Write your answer in the space provided.

# What Parents Can Expect

**TNReady is designed to measure the new, more rigorous expectations of the state standards. Because the tests measure complex skills, which are different from the skills measured by previous state tests, scores on these assessments will initially look lower. But students aren't doing worse—it's just that the bar is higher.**

**As students and teachers gain the skills and knowledge needed to meet the new higher standards, performance will also improve. In other states where more rigorous tests have been implemented, students improved their performance after the first year.**

## When and how will the first TNReady results be reported?

Reporting of the TNReady test results from spring 2016 will be delayed slightly. As this is TNReady's inaugural year, Tennessee educators need to evaluate all the results and set standards that will determine which scores signify that a student is on track for their grade level. Once this process is complete, districts will receive detailed information about student results in fall 2016. The redesigned score report will offer more context on student performance and will include clear, actionable guidance. In addition, each student's performance will be compared to others at the individual school, city and state levels.

## How will schools support students during the transition?

Schools have created a variety of models to assist students who are struggling with the standards. Remediation and summer courses, in-class adjustments based on ongoing in-class assessment results, and pull-out tutoring are just a few support strategies. Parents should collaborate with teachers and administrators to develop additional strategies as needed.

**▶ TAKE ACTION: Parents can work with school or district curriculum directors to learn about the new curriculum and understand how to support their children to minimize any dips in assessment scores.**

## How will students, teachers and schools be held accountable?

It is up to local school systems to decide the criteria for advancement at each grade level, including whether or not to use assessment scores to determine student retention or promotion. Local school systems will involve parents in any decisions regarding students who may need help.

Last year the state legislature voted to give school districts the option to exclude results from this year's assessment in student grades. Governor Haslam also recently proposed additional flexibility for teacher evaluations, stipulating that TNReady scores would only be included in teacher evaluation if it actually helps the teacher.

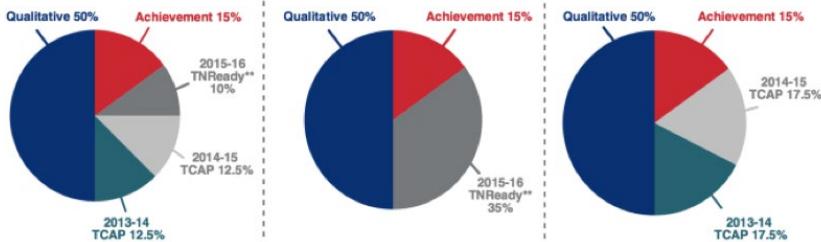
Under the governor's proposal, teachers will have the option to include or not to include results from the 2015-16 TNReady and TCAP tests within the student growth component of their evaluation, depending on which scenario benefits them the most.

In other words, if TNReady results from this year help a teacher earn a higher evaluation score, they would be used. If they do not help a teacher earn a higher score, they would not be used.

In this way, both teachers and students will have time to adapt to the new TNReady tests before the tests are fully used to determine accountability.

## 2015-16 Teacher Evaluation Options\*

Option 1: Current Three-year Composite Under Tennessee Teaching Evaluation Enhancement Act	Option 2: Full <u>TNReady</u>	Option 3: NEW: <u>Excluding TNReady</u>
---	----------------------------------	--



\* All three options are also available for teachers with no prior Tennessee Value-Added Assessment System (TVAAS) data. For the above charts, the qualitative portion would be increased in place of the earlier TCAP data.

\*\* For 2015-16, student growth data may come from TNReady in math or English language arts or the TCAP in social studies or science.

Note: These weightings ensure stability in the number of tested students per teacher year to year. Additionally, districts will have the ability to allow their teachers to choose a new achievement measure for 2015-16.

Tennessee's accountability system is primarily focused on school districts, which are evaluated based on their ability to raise overall achievement and close gaps between groups of students. The state also identifies three types of schools in Tennessee and learns from their successes and needs for improvement.

- [Reward Schools](#) have the highest overall student achievement levels and other schools learn from their successes.
- [Priority Schools](#) have the lowest overall performance and receive support from the state to raise achievement.
- [Focus Schools](#) have the largest achievement gaps between groups of students and interventions are planned for these schools.

# Take Action

**Parents are their child's best advocates. As a parent and your child's first teacher you should be informed of the assessment and accountability system that is in place in your child's school. Parents and families must be at the table with school leaders and school districts to ensure that testing is implemented well and with enough resources to ensure success.**

The Tennessee Department of Education includes parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration and respect. For additional details about the state's assessment and accountability system, please email the department at [TNReady.Questions@tn.gov](mailto:TNReady.Questions@tn.gov).

Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- How many assessments will my child take this school year and where can I access/view the assessment calendar?
- What will happen if my child does not meet proficiency on the new assessments?
- How will the results of tests be used to support my child's learning?
- What can I do, as a parent, to help my child do his or her best?
- How will school evaluations be affected based on results of the new assessments?

Also, be sure to speak with your local school administrators! Ask them to host a parent night in the spring to explain the tests and in the fall to explain test results.

Below is the list of policies and practices that National PTA supports. Check with the Tennessee Department of Education to determine if Tennessee's policies and practices are closely aligned with those of the PTA.

- National PTA believes that valid assessment does not consist of only a single test score, and that at no time should a single test be considered the sole determinant of a student's academic or work future.
- National PTA supports nationally agreed upon voluntary standards if they are derived by consensus at the state and local levels. Parents must be involved in this process.
- National PTA believes that assessments provide valuable information to parents, teachers and school leaders about the growth and achievement of their students. Furthermore, having annual data on the performance of students can help inform teaching and learning as well as identify achievement gaps among groups of students within a school and among a school district. National PTA believes assessments are essential to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education.

# Preparing and Supporting Your Child

- Review the testing calendar and work with your child’s school to ensure there will be regular and clear communications from the school on the assessments, the results and how they are used.
- Discuss the new tests with your children. Make sure they feel comfortable and understand why they are taking a test.
- With older children, explain that the new assessments were created to make sure they are on track to succeed after graduation and to identify any issues early enough to give them more support.
- Explain to your child that the tests will initially be more challenging. Tell your child you have high expectations and that you and the teachers are there to help every step of the way.
- Review test results with your child and his or her teacher.
- Make sure your child has a comfortable place for studying and is prepared mentally and physically for a test.

## Staying informed and involved:

- Become familiar with TNReady, visit: [tn.gov/tnready](http://tn.gov/tnready)
- Learn about Tennessee academic standards, visit: [tn.gov/education/topic/academic-standards](http://tn.gov/education/topic/academic-standards)
- Read all comments written by the teacher on classroom lessons and tests. Ask teachers to explain anything that is unclear and discuss how you can best work together to address areas of improvement for your child.
- Monitor your child’s progress and regularly communicate with your child’s teachers. If your child needs extra help or wants to learn more about a subject, work with his or her teacher to identify opportunities for tutoring, after-school clubs or other resources.
- Tests are not perfect measures of what a child can do—there are many other factors that might influence a test score. For example, a child can be affected by the way he or she is feeling on test day or the particular classroom setting.
- Meet with your child’s teacher as often as possible to discuss progress. Ask for activities to do at home to help prepare for tests and improve your child’s proficiency.

## Additional Resources

- Visit the Tennessee Department of Education web site: [tn.gov/education](http://tn.gov/education)