



Participation in Spring 2021 Kentucky State Testing

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) acknowledges the challenges and complexities schools are facing during the COVID-19 pandemic. The department is committed to providing information to parents, educators and stakeholders that will help them make informed decisions that benefit Kentucky's students.

At the present time, the United States Department of Education (USED) has not granted waivers of federally required testing for the 2020-2021 school year. The following guidance explains the rationale for this decision and offers links to guidance for administering the required testing.

Please note there are many unknowns and the situation is fluid. This guidance could change as the pandemic unfolds. The KDE awaits further guidance, directions or waivers offered by USED on Spring 2021 assessments. As this dynamic situation evolves, the KDE will change and adapt as needed and will seek state or federal flexibilities or waivers.

State and Federal Expectations to Test

The administration of annual summative assessments is required by state and federal law; and at the time of this publication, USED has not granted waivers on the required participation of public-school students. In fact, on Sept. 3, in a letter to Chief State School Officers, Education Secretary Betsy DeVos announced that states should not anticipate such waivers. Therefore, KDE's Office of Assessment and Accountability (OAA) is planning and preparing for the in-person administration of the *Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress* (K-PREP) and other standardized state assessments.

All additional federal guidance to date has indicated that states should expect to assess students in the 2020-2021 school year. Specifically, on Jan. 18, the USED Office of Elementary and Secondary Education released guidance on the administration of the English Language Proficiency (ELP) exam for English learners. The [Providing Services to English Learners During the COVID-19 Outbreak fact sheet](#) provides direction on administration of annual ELP exams. Kentucky uses WIDA's ELP exams, ACCESS and Alternate ACCESS assessments.

Rationale for Testing

Annual state testing provides critical information about school and student performance to parents, educators and state and district policy decision-makers. The assessment results can help determine if students are meeting academic expectations, identify holes in student learning, areas where supports or assistance are needed and identify gaps among different student groups (e.g., students of color, students with disabilities, students not yet proficient in English, economically disadvantaged students).



COVID-19 Guidance for Schools

February 15, 2021

Considering the COVID-19 crisis, the most important reason for administering state assessments this spring is to gain a clearer picture of the pandemic’s impact on student learning, including for those most vulnerable groups. Recent studies suggest the learning loss in mathematics is large and is modest in reading.¹ Will Lorié of the Center for Assessment defines learning loss “not as a reduction in existing knowledge or skills, but as a difference between a current reality and some ideal or at least normal condition. With the COVID-19 school closures, that normal condition is spring 2020 without COVID-19, and the loss is the difference in the learning that occurred during disruption and the learning that would have occurred in a COVID-free spring 2020.”²

The ACT, ACCESS, K-PREP and Alternate assessments have been administered for years in Kentucky and provide very consistent data about students and schools. Because of this consistency and comparability, state assessments will likely be the most useful source of information on the statewide impact of the pandemic.

Students and families utilize state test results in multiple ways. On the ELP exams, English Learners can demonstrate their command of the English language in order to exit or enter the English Learner Program. Early Graduates can exhibit performance on the end-of-course and ACT assessments that allows them to leave high school early and proceed to the next stage in their lives. High school students can demonstrate levels on the ACT or career and technical exams that may lead to acceptance in college, apprenticeships or other advanced opportunities. Without the administration of state assessments, these opportunities could be lost.

Note: While state assessments may provide insight on the statewide impact of the pandemic, districts may also use their own data to determine individual student and school impact.

Participation Matters

The [2015 Every Student Succeeds Act \(ESSA\)](#) is the core federal education law for all public schools in the United States. ESSA requires a 95% student participation rate in annual state assessments. USED waived this mandatory requirement for the 2019-2020 educational year. USED has not waived this requirement for the 2020-2021 school year. As a result, Kentucky must prepare to administer an annual assessment in accordance with ESSA.

Many federally funded programs support schools in providing equitable services to their students, such as special education, English Learners and migrant students. Not meeting the federal participation rate requirement in state assessments could jeopardize state, district and school funding for those programs.

¹ https://www.nciea.org/sites/default/files/inline-files/CFA_LearningLossRecoveryGrowthStatewideTesting_0.pdf

² <https://www.nciea.org/blog/school-disruption/contextualizing-covid-19-learning-loss-and-learning-recovery>



COVID-19 Guidance for Schools

February 15, 2021

Spring 2021 Testing Plan

Kentucky administers criterion-referenced assessments (Kentucky Summative Assessments) in reading and mathematics at all grades 3 through 8 and 10; in science at grades 4, 7 and 11; and in social studies (field test) and writing at grades 5, 8 and 11. In addition, students in grade 11 take a state administration of the ACT. Students participating in the Alternate Assessment program take a modified version of the summative assessments and the Transition Attainment Record (TAR) as substitution for the ACT. English learner students at all grades take an annual administration of ACCESS for ELLs[®] or Alternate ACCESS for ELLs[®].

2020-2021 Tentative State Testing Plan

Content Areas	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	10	11	12
Reading				X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Mathematics				X	X	X	X	X	X	X		
Science					X			X			X	
On-Demand Writing						X			X		X	
College Admissions Examination (The ACT)											X	
English Proficiency Exam (English Learners Only)	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X

*A field test in social studies is planned for Spring 2021 in grades 5, 8 and 11.

In typical years, on average, administering Kentucky’s state-level assessments takes less than 1% of the total instructional time in a given school year. With consideration of the limited amount of in-person instructional time students have had, OAA has worked internally and with test vendors to provide flexible testing windows and reduce the amount of time for assessment administration even further where possible.

District and school staff should make a reasonable, dedicated effort to assess all students. All students attending school in-person full or part time should be scheduled for testing on their in-person days. Additionally, school administrators should plan, in conjunction with district administrators, to bring in small groups of students who are in a full-time virtual setting for testing. Students served in a homebound or hospital setting who are provided with in-person services should also be scheduled to take the state assessment. School and district testing plans should be communicated to parents in advance of testing windows.

Remote proctoring with students taking assessments at home without a trained administrator is not an option on state assessments for the 2020-2021 school year.



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The safety of school staff, students and their families continues to be the KDE's primary concern. All test administrations in-person at school buildings or in home or hospital settings should follow the [Guidance on Safety Expectations and Best Practices for Kentucky Schools \(K-12\)](#) and the most current health guidance at the time of testing.

Additional Resources

[Office of Assessment and Accountability Covid-19 Webpage](#)

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