



WCS Assessment FAQ

What does it mean for an assessment to be a “Standardized test”?

In general, a standardized test is one that all students take the same test at the same time and have it scored the same way so that comparisons can be made with the results. This is not always feasible in practice, but the idea is to minimize the effects test administration differences have on a student’s performance.

Most standardized tests fall into one of two categories: norm-referenced or criterion-referenced. Norm-referenced tests are designed to compare an individual’s achievement to that of a group of peers, often in terms of a percentile. Criterion-referenced tests are designed to compare an individual’s achievement to a standard or benchmark, often in terms of a scale score.

What is the difference between “formative assessment” and “summative assessment”?

When people hear the term “assessment”, they often think about high stakes end-of-year tests. While those assessments still exist, educators use a wide spectrum of assessments to measure student progress and mastery. At one end of the spectrum are those high stakes tests, but at the other end are simple “checks for understanding” teachers use to constantly gauge where students are. Most of the assessments along this spectrum can be used through formative or summative assessments.

Formative assessments are those used to gather information about where students are along their individual learning process. These assessments provide feedback while the learning is taking place, affording teachers the opportunity to adjust and individualize instruction prior to summative testing.

Summative assessments are those used to evaluate what students have mastered upon the completion of their individual learning process. These assessments summarize learning by comparing it against some standard or benchmark (grading rubric, proficiency level, etc.).

What is the difference between “achievement” and “growth” in assessment?

A student’s achievement on an assessment is usually defined by a numerical score where a higher number represents greater achievement. For example, if one student scores 440 on a test and another student scores 520, one can say the second student achieved more than the first student.

Growth is actually a vague term and can be interpreted many ways without context. Some measure growth by comparing the difference between two scores on the same (or at least statistically identical) tests. For example, if a student scores 60 on a pretest and then 80 on a posttest, one might call this a 20-point growth. A better term would be to call this “achievement gain”.



Many TCAP assessments use “value-added growth” instead of achievement gains to measure growth. The essence behind value-added growth is measuring how much a student achieved compared to his peers with a similar academic history on the same assessment. If a low achieving student showed positive value-added growth while a high achieving student showed negative value-added growth, one might argue the first student learned more than the second student despite having a lower achievement score.

How are assessments used for grades? Where can parents/students get results from the assessments?

Most assessments are designed and administered by the classroom teacher, so any questions about grades and results for those should be directed to that teacher.

Of all the [assessments provided](#) on the State, District & College Readiness Tests page, only the TCAP TNReady and Semester Exams are required to be a portion of a student’s semester grades. The TCAP requirement is mandated by the state, the Semester Exams by district policy.

Distribution of results vary by assessment, but most are available directly through the school. More information about how results are made available can be found on the [District Assessment Calendar](#).

What financial assistance options are there for assessments with fees?

The college readiness assessments (national ACT, AP, PSAT, and SAT) do require a fee to participate, but there are fee-reduction options for those that qualify. Eligible students should to contact their school’s testing coordinator for options. Details, including eligibility requirements, are available at each assessment’s website:

- [ACT Fee Waiver Information](#)
- [AP Fee Reduction Information](#)
- [PSAT Fee Reduction Information](#)
- [SAT Fee Reduction Information](#)

What is the process for opting out of TCAP assessments?

Tennessee requires student participation in state assessments by virtue of both state and federal laws. The General Counsel for the Tennessee Department of Education has clarified that parents may not refuse or opt a child out of participating in state mandated assessments. There are also no provisions authorizing students to opt out of mandated assessments.

If a student refuses to participate in a TCAP test that is to be used for a portion of that student’s grade, a zero will be calculated for the required percentage.



How can homeschooled students in Williamson County participate in assessments through WCS?

State law requires independent home school students to be tested in grades 5, 7, and 9, but students may test in other grades as well. Those choosing to participate in the TCAP assessments to meet this requirement may do so at their zoned school during the district's regularly scheduled test administrations at no cost.

Homeschool students interested in taking AP or PSAT tests may also participate at their zoned school during the district's regularly scheduled test administrations. The student is responsible for any associated fees as part of the registration process. Financial assistance is available for those that qualify (see previous question about financial assistance options for specifics).

Schools begin preparing for test administrations several weeks prior to test dates, so it is important for parents of home school students to contact the zoned school's testing coordinator at least one month in advance to ensure materials will be available for testing. Typically the parent and testing coordinator will handle the pretest procedures before test day, the student will test along with other students during the regularly scheduled administration, and the school will submit the test to the testing vendor.