

# **Opting Out of Annual Assessments October 2023**

## **What is the Purpose of Annual Assessments?**

Annual assessments are critical to ensure that all students are making strong academic progress. In Tennessee, one measure of student, school, and district academics is through the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP), which are tests aligned with our state's academic standards, outlining what students are expected to know, guiding educators as they design their lessons and curriculum. As Tennessee's teachers work to equip all students with the knowledge and skills they need, we must ensure that we can identify any major gaps in students' learning and find variations in growth among different schools – both so we can strengthen support in places that need it and learn from educators and students who are excelling.

Results from TCAP tests give both teachers and parents a unique feedback loop and big-picture perspective to better understand how students are progressing and how to support their academic development. This yearly academic check-up is the best way to see how all students in Tennessee are doing, and it is one key measure through which we learn if we are meeting our responsibility to prepare all students for college and the workforce. Because of the importance of annual assessment, we believe it is crucial for all students to take all TCAP tests each year.

## **May parents opt their students out of testing?**

No, state and federal law requires student participation in state assessments. In fact, these statutes specifically reference the expectation that all students enrolled in public schools in Tennessee will complete annual assessments. Given both the importance and legal obligation, parents may not refuse or opt a child out of participating in state assessments. Therefore, school districts are not authorized to adopt policies allowing these actions.

If a school offers alternate activities for students whose parents refuse to have them participate in state assessments, they would in effect be allowing them to opt out. School districts should address student absences on testing days in the same manner as they would address a student's failure to participate in any other mandatory activity at school (e.g. final exams) by applying the district's or school's attendance policies.