Significant Medical Emergencies in Participation Rate Calculations

Federal law (ESEA as reauthorized by ESSA), state law (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-281), and State Board of Education (SBOE) rule (160-3-1-.07) require each school district to assess all students, including students with disabilities and English learners, using SBOE-designated assessment instruments, as required. All students must be included, to the fullest extent possible, in all statewide assessments and have their assessment results included in Georgia’s accountability system. Neither the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) nor the local district or school has the authority to waive the student assessment requirement mandated by federal and state law.

Districts must assemble a local testing calendar that allows for the participation of all students including, where able, hospital/homebound (HHB), as well as includes dates intended for make-up sessions for students absent from regular testing dates. While all students are required by law to participate in assessments, for accountability purposes, the U.S. Department of Education (ED) allows states to remove students who experience a significant medical emergency from participation rate calculations:

There may be circumstances beyond a LEA's control, however, when a student cannot be assessed at any time during the testing window due to a significant medical emergency (e.g., a student is hospitalized due to an accident). In these cases, we do not believe the school or LEA should be penalized for that student's absence due to the documented significant medical emergency. Therefore, when determining the percentage of students taking an assessment, States do not have to include a student with a significant medical emergency in the participation rate calculation. States desiring to use this flexibility are responsible for determining what constitutes a significant medical emergency.

Source: https://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/stateletters/prates.html

Because the nature of significant medical emergencies is sensitive and unique to each student and the associated circumstances, the use of medical emergency as a non-participation reason is ultimately a local district decision. However, the following guidance is intended to assist districts in determining if the use of medical emergency as a non-participation reason is appropriate.

A “significant medical emergency” is a rare medical event that prevents a student who otherwise would have participated in the assessment from participating throughout the duration of the state testing window, including make-up opportunities.

Examples of significant medical emergency may include a serious car accident, hospitalization, severe trauma, mental health crisis that is dangerous to self or others, or placement in hospice care. A parent/guardian refusal or doctor’s note, even for a medical reason, does not necessarily constitute a medical emergency (see above guidance as well as the “Makeup Tests” and “Homebound/Hospitalized Students” sections of the Student Assessment Handbook). Districts must follow all guidance in the Student Assessment Handbook for test administration. Documentation of the significant medical emergency should be kept on file in the district.
While significant medical emergencies are removed from participation rate calculations, there may be other situations beyond the school’s or district’s control preventing students from participating in required assessments. The federal participation rate requirement for accountability purposes is 95% to acknowledge such situations. A school or district’s accountability results (achievement scores) will not be adjusted for student non-participation unless the participation rate is less than 95%, after removing medical emergencies from the calculation.