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*"Educating Georgia's Future"*

## **When Students Do Not Participate in State-Mandated Assessments Due to a Parent's Choice Frequently Asked Questions**

In recent years, the use of assessments has become a topic of concern for parents/guardians, educators, and students. It is important to understand the role that high-quality assessments play in providing parents/guardians, teachers, and school leaders with valuable information about student growth and achievement. It is also important that, when a parent chooses for their child not to participate, we provide appropriate learning opportunities for those students.

### **What is the purpose of the Georgia Student Assessment Program?**

The purpose of the Georgia Student Assessment Program, including Georgia Milestones and the Georgia Alternate Assessment (GAA), is to measure student achievement of the state-adopted academic content standards and to inform efforts to improve teaching and learning. All assessments are developed with educator input and reviewed by independent experts. Results of the assessment program are utilized to identify students failing to achieve mastery of content; to provide educators with feedback about instructional practices; to assist school districts in identifying strengths and weaknesses in order to establish priorities in planning educational programs; and to ensure that students have the opportunity to learn and excel.

The results from state tests provide the public with much needed information about how all students are performing. Student test scores are the foundation of Georgia's College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) and district/school report cards, which are designed to show parents/guardians, communities, policymakers, and school and district leaders how well students are achieving. Allowing for comparisons between districts and schools is important in understanding and improving efforts to support Georgia's public education 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 (O.C.G.A. § 20-2-281).

### **Should students who are not participating in Georgia Milestones be told to stay home?**

If a parent decides their child will not take the Georgia Milestones, the student should never be told to stay home since compulsory attendance laws apply during testing as they would on any other school day. The GaDOE believes students not participating in the Georgia Milestones should never be "punished" for not taking the test but should be offered an appropriate learning opportunity.

### **Are there consequences for students not taking the Georgia Milestones?**

There are requirements in both Georgia law (O.C.G.A §20-2-282 - §20-2-285) and State Board of Education (SBOE) Rule that, if not met, carry direct consequences for students. For specified grades in elementary schools and middle schools, these relate to requirements for promotion to the next grade level. Those districts under Charter or Strategic Waiver School System (SWSS) Partnership Contracts with the state of Georgia may have differing policies related to promotion, placement, and retention. Districts should follow their local board policies regarding any local policies impacted, including any pertaining to grades 4, 6, and 7.

Designated high school courses require that the Georgia Milestones End of Course (EOC) measures serve as the final exam and that they comprise a defined portion of a student's final course grade. For students who entered ninth grade for the first time after July 1, 2011, the numeric score on the Georgia Milestones EOC counts 20% of the student's final numeric grade in the course.

In the absence of the EOC score, the school would be compelled to calculate that course grade without this required component. Simply put, this would result in a course grade that would not reflect the true achievement of the student.

### **What are the federal requirements for testing?**

Federal law, specifically the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), requires annual testing in grades 3 through 8 and at least once in high school in English language arts and mathematics. Grades 3 through 5, 6-9, and 10-12 must be assessed at least once in science. Also, ESSA requires a 95% participation rate in state assessments among all students and all student subgroups and requires the 95% participation rate be an element of school accountability systems, such as CCRPI.

### **What can parents/guardians do if they wish for their child not to participate?**

In keeping with GaDOE belief, students not participating in the Georgia Milestones should never be "punished" for not taking the test but should be offered an appropriate learning opportunity. The Georgia Department of Education understands and respects a parent's/guardian's desire to ensure the best education possible for his/her student. To that end, it is recommended and encouraged for parents/guardians and district and school leaders to have a conversation about what state assessments are and are not. This would include acknowledgment and discussion of a parents'/guardians' apprehensions and objections and what to do when a student does not participate in state assessments. Schools should discuss state and local policies surrounding testing, as well as the general uses of assessment data to inform instruction and measure student progress.