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A Parent's Guide to Tests and Assessments

Testing is one tool that schools use to measure how well students understand and apply what they learn in class. We use a variety of tests and assessments to monitor student performance, including multiple choice tests, portfolios, performance tasks, and essays. Assessment results are used to evaluate whether students need additional support and/or enrichment.

Some assessments are required by the state and federal government, while others are chosen by Durham Public Schools to improve student, school, and district performance.

North Carolina-developed assessments are curriculum-based tests designed to measure the objectives found in the state-adopted content standards. The assessments are available online and by paper/pencil, and all students are allowed ample opportunity to complete the assessments. Students with disabilities and students identified as English Learners (ELs) may also receive approved accommodations to complete certain assessments. The need for accommodations must be documented in the student's current Individualized Education Plan (IEP), Limited English Proficient (LEP) Plan, or Section 504 Plan. Students may take a standard administration with or without accommodations or an alternate assessment, as specified in the student's plan.

To help parents better understand what tests are required and how they support student achievement, this guide provides an overview of the district assessments.



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Assessments Given by Grade Level – Elementary

Name of Assessment	Required or Optional?	Who takes it?	What is it and why is it important?	How are results used?
Kindergarten Entry				
Kindergarten Initial Assessment (KIA)	Two parts -- one part is required by DPS (key data points) and one part (portfolio) is required by state	Entering kindergarten students	Measures kindergarten readiness in Literacy, math, physical, personal and social skills. Additionally, early childcare information is collected to inform teachers of previous school experience.	The results provide a baseline of student knowledge and informs instruction.
English/Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science				
mCLASS Reading 3D	State-mandated	Grades K-3	A universal screener that assesses a student's ability to hear beginning sounds, separate words that they hear, and decode words. Screenings predict future reading success. The comprehension portion measures print concepts and the student's ability to read text, orally retell, and answer questions in written form. The assessments also measure reading gains during the beginning, middle, and end of the year.	Results are used to inform small group reading instruction. Parents receive information about their student's progress and activities to do at home through a Home Connect Letter that is sent from the school three times each year.
mCLASS Reading 3D	Teacher and school discretion	Grades 4-5	A universal screener that assesses fluency and comprehension.	Results are used to inform small-group reading instruction. Parents receive information about their student's progress and activities to do at home through a Home Connect Letter that is sent from the school three times each year.
Local Benchmark Assessments for English/ Language Arts, Math and Science (CASE 21)	Required by DPS	Grades 3-5 (Schools may opt into 2nd grade)	Comprehensive assessments administered two times a year to determine student understanding and growth on grade-level standards.	Teachers use these results to guide and inform both individual and small-group reading instruction. The results are used by teachers/schools to determine areas for enrichment and remediation aligned to standards that have been taught.

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Name of Assessment	Required or Optional?	Who takes it?	What is it and why is it important?	How are results used?
iREADY	Teacher and school discretion	Grades 4-5	Periodic computer adaptive assessments administered to determine mastery of skills and standards.	The results are used by teachers/schools to determine skills that may need remediation and additional instruction.
K-2 Assessments	State-mandated	All K-2 students	Quarterly assessment tasks created to assess students' understanding of standards.	Teachers use these results to determine areas for enrichment and remediation. Results are also used to conduct conferences with parents, and are included in the student portfolio for the following year's classroom teacher.
Common District Assessments (CDAs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Math grades 3-5 ELA grades 3-5 Science grade 5 	Required for High Priority schools; otherwise optional	Students at High Priority schools and those that elect to do so	To inform instruction and provide feedback to students regarding their progress.	Results are used as formative assessments to inform students of their progress in these courses. Teachers also use the data to inform instruction.
English Language Learners				
ACCESS for English language learners (ELLs)	State-mandated	English language learners in grades K-12	The ACCESS for ELLs is a large-scale test of English language proficiency based on the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) English Language Development Standards.	Results are used to satisfy state and federal requirements for the annual assessment of the English language proficiency of English Language Learners.
World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT)	State-mandated	Students with a home language other than English	The W-APT placement test is used to identify students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP).	This placement test is used to identify English Language Learners.
State Accountability				
N.C. Beginning-of-Grade (BOG) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ELA/ Reading - Grade 3 	State-mandated	Grade 3	The Beginning of Grade (BOG) is the state's mandated reading assessment to collect baseline data in English/Language Arts (ELA).	Results are used to measure student growth and proficiency.

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Name of Assessment	Required or Optional?	Who takes it?	What is it and why is it important?	How are results used?
N.C. End-of-Grade (EOG) exams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • ELA/ Reading - Grade 3, 4, 5 • Math - Grades 3, 4, 5 • Science - Grade 5 	State-mandated	Grades 3-5	The EOG assessments are state-mandated tests that measure students' mastery of state standards in ELA/Reading, math and science.	The N.C. Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) uses EOG results as one measure of school accountability. Summary results are also used for school improvement actions.
N.C. Final Exams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Science - Grade 4 • Social Studies - Grades 4, 5 	State-mandated when teacher is not teaching ELA or Math	Grades 4-5 for subjects not assessed by the EOG exam	The N.C. Final Exams are state-mandated tests that measure a student's mastery of the State Standards.	The N.C. Department of Public Instruction uses this data to determine teacher and school growth in all subjects.
Nationally Normed Tests				
Cognitive Abilities Test (CogAT)	Required by district for Grade 2	Grade 2 Grades 3-12 for students referred for AIG	A Universal Screener that is used to measure general thinking and problem-solving skills and indicates how well the student uses these skills to solve verbal, quantitative and nonverbal problems.	In combination with other relevant information about a student, scores can be used to adapt instruction in ways that enhance the student's success in learning. Scores may also be used as part of the identification process for the Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) program.
Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS)	Optional	Grades 2-12	ITBS® is a nationally standardized achievement test for K-12 students that measures Reading, Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science.	Scores can be used to compare a student's scores to children across the country. Scores may also be used as part of the identification process for the Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) program.
Otis Lennon School Ability Test (OLSAT)	Optional	Grades K-12	A cognitive abilities test measuring verbal, nonverbal and quantitative skills in students K-12.	Scores reflect a student's ability related to his/her academic success providing educators and parents information about a student's thinking and problem-solving skills. Scores may also be used as part of the identification process for the Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) program.

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Name of Assessment	Required or Optional?	Who takes it?	What is it and why is it important?	How are results used?
Naglieri Nonverbal Ability Test (NNAT)	Optional	Grades K-12	A nonverbal group-administered abilities test used to estimate students' reasoning and problem-solving skills.	Scores can be used to measure a student's aptitude, focusing on analytic and problem-solving skills rather than specific knowledge. Scores may also be used as part of the identification process for the Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) program.
Woodcock Johnson IV, Test of Achievement	Optional	Grades K-12	WJ IV ACH includes 20 tests for measuring four broad academic domains: reading, written language, mathematics, and academic knowledge.	Scores may be used as part of the identification process for the Academically and Intellectually Gifted (AIG) program.

Assessments Given by Grade Level – Middle

Name of Assessment	Required or Optional?	Who takes it?	What is it and why is it important?	How are results used?
Reading, Mathematics, and Science				
iREADY for Reading and Math	Teacher and school discretion	Grades 6-8	iREADY is an online assessment program that is used to give universal screenings in reading and mathematics. The assessment is at the sub-skill level to determine specific diagnostic information to inform teacher instruction.	This quick universal screener allows schools to assess sub-skills to inform instruction to address specific learning gaps.
Local benchmark assessments for Reading, Math, and Science (CASE 21)	Required by DPS	Grades 6-8 Reading & Math Grade 8 Science	Comprehensive assessments administered two times a year to determine student understanding and growth on grade-level standards.	Teachers use these results to guide and inform both individual and small-group reading instruction. The results are used by teachers/schools to determine areas for enrichment and remediation aligned to standards that have been taught.

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Name of Assessment	Required or Optional?	Who takes it?	What is it and why is it important?	How are results used?
<p>Common District Assessments (CDAs)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NC Math I • Math grades 6-8 • ELA grades 6-8 • Science grade 8 	Required for High Priority schools; otherwise optional	Middle school students enrolled in these courses and where teachers have elected to administer the District CDAs	To inform instruction and provide feedback to students regarding their progress.	Results are used as formative assessments to inform students of their progress in these courses. Teachers also use the data to inform instruction.
English Language Learners				
ACCESS for English language learners (ELLs)	State-mandated	ELLs in grades K-12	The ACCESS for ELLs is a large-scale test of English language proficiency based on the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) English Language Development Standards.	Results are used to satisfy state and federal requirements for the annual assessment of the language proficiency of English language learners.
World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT)	State-mandated	Any student with a home language other than English	The W-APT placement test is used to identify students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP).	This placement test is used to identify students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP).
State Accountability				
N.C. End-of-Course (EOC) exams for High School Courses taught in Middle School	State-mandated	Students enrolled in a high school credit course (Math I & III, Biology, English II)	The EOC assessments are state-mandated tests that measure mastery of State Standards.	The results of the EOC tests are used for state accreditation and compliance with state and federal mandates. Individual student results are used as one measure to make educational decisions. Summary results are used as one measure to guide school improvement actions. Per N.C. State Board of Education policy, schools are to use results from all EOC tests as at least 20 percent of the student's final grade for each respective course.

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Name of Assessment	Required or Optional?	Who takes it?	What is it and why is it important?	How are results used?
<p>N.C. End of Grade (EOG) Exams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reading – Grades 6, 7, 8 • Math – Grades 6,7,8 • Science – Grade 8 	State-mandated	Grades 6-8	The EOG assessments are state-mandated tests that measure students' mastery of state standards in ELA/ Reading, math and science.	The results of the EOG tests are used for overall school proficiency scores. Individual student results are used as one measure to make educational decisions. Summary results are used as one measure to guide school improvement actions.
<p>N.C. Final Exams</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • CTE • High School credit courses as required • Middle School Social Studies – Grades 6-8 • Middle School Science – Grades 6-7 	State-mandated	Students enrolled in an NCFE course	The NC Final Exam assessments are state-mandated tests that measure students' mastery of state standards in ELA/ Reading, math and science.	The N.C. Department of Public Instruction requires and uses this data to determine teacher and school growth in all subjects. For various high school credit courses taken in middle school, this test will also count as 20 percent of the student's overall grade in the course.

Assessments Given by Grade Level – High

Name of Assessment	Required or Optional?	Who takes it?	What is it and why is it important?	How are results used?
Reading, Mathematics, and Science				
<p>Local Assessments/ Benchmarks (CASE 21)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NC Math I • Math III • English II • Biology 	Required by DPS	High school students enrolled in these courses	To inform instruction and provide feedback to students regarding their progress.	Results are used as formative assessments to inform students of their progress in these courses. Teachers also use the data to inform instruction.

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Name of Assessment	Required or Optional?	Who takes it?	What is it and why is it important?	How are results used?
District Common Assessments (CDAs) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • NC Math I • NC Math II • NC Math III • English II • Biology 	Optional	High school students enrolled in these courses, where teachers have elected to administer the District CDAs	To inform instruction and provide feedback to students regarding their progress.	Results are used as formative assessments to inform students of their progress in these courses. Teachers also use the data to inform instruction.
World Languages District Benchmarks and Final Exams	Required by district	All students enrolled in Spanish I, II, III; French I, II, III; Spanish for Native Speakers I, II; Chinese I, II; Latin I & II; Russian I & II; ASL I & II	To inform instruction and provide feedback to students regarding their progress.	Results are used as formative assessments to inform students of their progress in these courses. Teachers also use the data to inform instruction.
Advanced Placement and International Baccalaureate				
Advanced Placement (AP) Exams	Optional	High school students who choose to take an exam, regardless of whether they are enrolled in an AP course.	The AP program allows students to take college-level courses and exams to earn college credit. AP exams consist of multiple-choice and free-response items. All AP exams are optional for students.	Students' AP exam results enhance their college applications and eligibility for scholarships. Results are also used by high schools for advising and counseling students, by DPS for evaluating instructional effectiveness and planning curriculum, and by colleges and universities to make decisions regarding admissions and scholarships.

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Name of Assessment	Required or Optional?	Who takes it?	What is it and why is it important?	How are results used?
International Baccalaureate (IB) Course Exams	Required by IB	IB juniors and seniors in the final year of an IB course	At the end of each course, students sit for an external examination prepared by an International Board of Examiners, which has the final authority on the setting of examinations and the assessment of all candidates for the awarding of the IB diploma. International Baccalaureate course exams are rigorous, and performance is measured against predetermined criteria rather than the performance of other students taking the same examinations.	Results are used by high schools for advising and counseling students, by DPS and IB for evaluating instructional effectiveness and planning curriculum, to determine awarding of IB diplomas, and by colleges and universities to make decisions regarding admissions, scholarships and course credit or placement.
College Entrance Exams				
ACT	State-mandated	Grade 11	The ACT is a standardized, curriculum-based, multiple-choice achievement test that includes four areas: English, mathematics, reading and science. The ACT assesses skills and knowledge that are important for success in college.	The results are used to fulfill state accountability measures. Results are also used by high schools for advising and counseling students, identifying opportunities for remediation and enrichment, and by colleges and universities to make decisions regarding admissions, scholarships and loans and course placement.
Pre-ACT	State-mandated	Grade 10	Pre-Act allows students to take a practice ACT to inform progress. Pre-ACT mirrors the ACT and includes four multiple-choice tests in English, math, reading, and science.	The results are used for advising and counseling students and identifying opportunities for remediation and enrichment prior to the ACT.
Preliminary SAT/ National Merit Scholarship Qualifying Test (PSAT/ NMSQT)	Optional	Select Students Grade 10	The PSAT is a standardized, multiple-choice test that includes three sections: critical reading, mathematics and writing. The test provides practice for the SAT and allows students the opportunity to enter National Merit scholarship programs. Individual PSAT results are helpful for advising and counseling students.	The results are used for advising and counseling students and identifying opportunities for remediation and enrichment prior to the SAT.

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Name of Assessment	Required or Optional?	Who takes it?	What is it and why is it important?	How are results used?
Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT)	Optional	High school students bound for colleges	There are two types of SAT tests offered: the SAT and the SAT Subject Tests. The SAT is a standardized, multiple-choice test with three sections: critical reading, mathematics and writing. The SAT assesses skills students need to be successful in college.	Results are used by high schools for advising and counseling students, by DPS for evaluating instructional effectiveness and planning curriculum, and by colleges and universities to make decisions regarding admissions, scholarships and loans, course placement and academic advising.
English Language Learners				
ACCESS for English language learners (ELLs)	State-mandated	English language learners in grades K-12	The ACCESS for ELLs is a large-scale test of English language proficiency based on the World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) English Language Development Standards.	Results are used to satisfy state and federal requirements for the annual assessment of the English language proficiency of English language learners.
World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment ACCESS Placement Test (W-APT)	State-mandated	Students with a home language other than English	The W-APT placement test is used to identify students with Limited English Proficiency (LEP).	This placement test is used to identify LEP students.
State Accountability				
N.C. End-of-Course (EOC) exams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Biology • English II • Math I • Math III 	State-mandated	Students enrolled in an EOC course	The EOC assessments are state-mandated tests that measure mastery of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for English language arts/reading and mathematics and the North Carolina Essential Standards for Science.	The results of the EOC tests are used for state accreditation and compliance with federal mandates. Individual student results are used as one measure to make educational decisions. Summary results are used as one measure to guide school improvement actions. Per N.C. State Board of Education policy, schools are to use results from all EOC tests as at least 20 percent of the student's final grade for each respective course.

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Name of Assessment	Required or Optional?	Who takes it?	What is it and why is it important?	How are results used?
N.C. Final Exams <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English I • English III • English IV • Physical Science • Chemistry • Physics • Earth/Environmental Science • World History • American History I • American History II • Civics & Economics • Math II • Discrete Math • Adv Functions and Modeling • Pre-calculus 	State-mandated	Students enrolled in an NCFE course	The NC Final Exam assessments are state-mandated tests that measure students' mastery of state standards in all courses.	The N.C. Department of Public Instruction requires and uses this data to determine teacher and school growth in all subjects. This test will also count as 20 percent of the student's overall grade in the course.
WorkKeys	State-mandated	Students enrolled in Grade 12 who are identified as Career and Technical Education concentrators	The three ACT WorkKeys assessments measure mastery of Applied Mathematics, Graphic Literacy, and Workplace Documents.	Results are the basis of the National Career Readiness Certificate program and connect work skills, training and skill testing for educators and employers.



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Resources

For more information about testing and assessments, please visit the websites listed below.

- **NC Department of Public Instruction:** <http://www.ncpublicschools.org/accountability/testing/>
- **DPS Student Handbook 2018-19:** https://www.dpsnc.net/cms/lib/NC01911152/Centricity/Domain/139/2018-19ParentFamilyStudent%20Handbook%20PRINT%20FINAL_r6.pdf
- **SAT/PSAT:** <https://collegereadiness.collegeboard.org/sat>
- **ACT:** <http://www.act.org/>
- **Advanced Placement:** <https://apstudent.collegeboard.org/home>
- **International Baccalaureate:** <https://www.ibo.org/>
- **Career Technical Education (CTE):** <https://careertech>