

# STATE STANDARDIZED TESTING REQUIREMENTS FOR PUBLIC, PRIVATE, AND HOME SCHOOLS

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**In Tennessee, K-12 students have three basic school options: public school or private school (both of which may be offered at either traditional brick and mortar sites or virtual school sites), or a home school.** Funding sources for these school options vary, as do state requirements for standardized testing of students, the primary method for holding schools accountable for student progress.

**It is well known that public schools, funded primarily by state and local tax dollars, are required to administer the state's standardized tests and use the results for school and district accountability.** What is perhaps less well known is that some of Tennessee's private schools, funded primarily through tuition and private donations, are also required to administer state standardized tests and follow the state's academic standards. In addition, some home school students and students with disabilities enrolled in Tennessee's new Individualized Education Account (IEA) program are required to take some type of standardized test, although parents have options other than the state's test.

**This summary reviews standardized testing requirements across public, private, and home schools, with a focus on how the requirements vary by school or student funding sources, as well as how the test results are used for school accountability. The full report is available at <http://www.comptroller.tn.gov/OREA/>.**

**Based on the most current data available, it appears that approximately 92 percent of Tennessee K-12 students – about 1 million – attend schools for which some type of standardized testing in selected grades is required by state law or rule. An estimated 87,000 students attend schools for which testing is not required, although standardized tests may still be administered.**

## Public Schools

Public school students must take the state's standardized tests, which for most students are the TNReady tests, annually in grades 3 through 8 and at the end of specific courses in grades 9 through 12. Public schools are primarily funded by the state and local dollars appropriated under the state's funding formula, the Basic Education Program (BEP), plus any additional local funds appropriated. Students' average test scores are publicly reported on the Tennessee Department of Education's (TDOE) Report Card.

## Private Schools

State testing requirements vary for students in private schools, depending on the state's classification of those schools into five categories. Based on 2017-18 enrollments reported to the Tennessee Department of Education:

- approximately 71 percent of private school students attend schools for which standardized testing is not required by the state, though many of these schools do administer some type of standardized tests for the use of their teachers and parents;
- roughly 25 percent of private school students attend schools that must administer a nationally recognized standardized test at least annually in grades 3 through 12, but the results are only for use of the individual schools and parents, and are not public; and



- the remaining 5 percent of Tennessee's private school students are required to follow public school testing requirements (i.e., students must take the TNReady standardized tests annually in grades 3 through 8, and at the end of specific courses in grades 9 through 11). Private schools in this category are directly approved by TDOE, and follow the state's academic standards. Although TNReady testing is required by state rules, the test results are not publicly reported.

Private schools are primarily funded through the tuition and fees paid by families or through private donations from individuals and organizations.

Some private schools may now receive public funds through Tennessee's Individualized Education Account (IEA) program for students with disabilities. The IEA program sets up education accounts for eligible students to use the equivalent of their school district's state and local per-pupil BEP allocation toward tuition and fees for approved private schools or for other education-related approved expenses, including those associated with home schooling. In 2017-18, 14 private schools are approved to accept state and local funds for participating students.

Students in the IEA program must take standardized tests in grades 3 through 8, except for those who would have qualified for alternate assessments, as determined under program rules. The private school must offer the state's TNReady test to participating students if their parents request it or administer one of the nationally recognized tests approved by TDOE. The test results are not publicly reported and are only for the use of parents.

## Home Schools

State testing requirements differ for the two types of homeschooling in Tennessee.

- Independent home school students (approximately 20 percent of the state's total estimated population of home school students) are required by law to take a standardized test in grades 5, 7, and 9. Parents may choose either the same TNReady tests administered to public school students or take alternative standardized tests administered by a professional testing service. Results are required to be provided to the parent-teacher, the director of the student's local public district, and the State Board of Education. Students in the IEA program who are independently home schooled must also meet the IEA testing requirements (annually in grades 3 through 8).
- Church-related umbrella home school students (approximately 80 percent of the state's total estimated population of home school students) are exempt from state testing requirements, although church-related schools may have their own testing requirements or parents may choose to administer standardized tests. Students in the IEA program who are home-schooled through an umbrella program are subject to the IEA testing requirements (annually in grades 3 through 8).

Home schools are largely self-funded by parents who direct their children's education; however, home school students with disabilities who participate in Tennessee's IEA program may now receive public funds that can be used for their home school education. In 2017-18, there are 87 students statewide participating in the IEA program. Thirty-seven students are enrolled in an independent home school. The other 50 students attend private schools, which may include some students enrolled in umbrella home school programs (classified as satellite programs of church-related private schools).



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