

GaDOE FAQ on Spring 2021 Federal Accountability, School Identification, and Report Card Waiver in Response to COVID-19 Pandemic

3-29-2021

Background

Since the onset of the pandemic, Superintendent Woods and the Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) have been committed to “compassion over compliance.” When COVID-19 cases started appearing in our schools in spring 2020, Georgia was one of the first states in the nation to suspend testing and accountability, leading the way for the U.S. Department of Education (ED) to grant blanket testing and accountability waivers to states across the nation.

At the beginning of the 2020-2021 school year, Superintendent Woods was joined by Governor Kemp in requesting an extension waiver from testing and accountability from ED. Regrettably, those waivers were initially denied, but Superintendent Woods worked quickly to minimize the ‘high stakes’ uses of test scores at the state level.

With the change in administration, Georgia again resubmitted its waiver requests. Though denied once more, it has been encouraging to see many of the strategies and flexibilities adopted by Georgia included in ED’s recent guidance and waiver template.

On March 26, 2021, Georgia received approval of a new set of waivers related to accountability. This FAQ provides detailed information related to how they will directly impact Georgia schools.

The waiver approval letter from ED can be [viewed here](#).

Are students waived from participating in federally required assessments in spring 2021?

The U.S. Department of Education has not waived or exempted assessments for any students – whether they are currently learning in-person or virtually – for the 2020-2021 school year. All districts must offer the opportunity to test to all students for all required assessments (Georgia Milestones, GAA, ACCESS for ELLs). Georgia’s assessments cannot be administered remotely.



The U.S. Department of Education did state that “we do not believe that if there are places where students are unable to attend school safely in person because of the pandemic that they should be brought into school buildings for the sole purpose of taking a test.” Accordingly, Superintendent Woods has directed that, if virtual students decline to attend school in-person solely to participate in testing due to health and safety concerns, they should not be required to do so.

Are assessments beyond those required by federal law still required in spring 2021?

Yes, state law still requires that students participate in the Georgia Kindergarten Inventory of Developing Skills (GKIDS) as well as Georgia Milestones in social studies in grade 8 and high school.

How much time will students spend participating in Georgia Milestones this spring?

GaDOE has proactively updated the Georgia Milestones test design to reduce the amount of time students spend on summative assessments. Due to these updates, all students will see at least a 3-hour reduction in testing time across all four content areas. On average, students taking assessments in all four content areas will save 4 ½ hours. For students in grades that assess ELA and math only, students on average will save 2 ¼ hours.

Are there any student consequences if a student does not participate in testing?

GaDOE has worked to minimize or eliminate all state-level consequences should a student decide not to participate in testing due to health and safety concerns. At a December 2020 called meeting, the State Board of Education (SBOE) approved Superintendent Woods’ recommendation to reduce the course grade weight of end of course (EOC) assessments to 0.01% of students’ grades. Additionally, Superintendent Woods directed all districts with a flexibility contract to use information other than Georgia Milestones scores for promotion and/or retention decisions. Finally, Superintendent Woods has directed that, if virtual students decline to attend school in-person solely to participate in testing due to health and safety concerns, they should not be required to do so (such as by denying course credit or grade promotion).

Are there any school or district consequences if less than 95% of students participate in testing?

With this approved waiver, Georgia is not required to calculate and report CCRPI scores, nor is GaDOE required to adjust the academic achievement indicator should participation rates fall below 95%.

What flexibilities are available to assist with the administration of spring assessments?

GaDOE has offered a variety of flexibilities, including extended state administration windows, alternate testing schedules for in-person and virtual students, afternoon or evening sessions, flexible grouping and ordering of content area tests, and use of other district locations for test

administrations. GaDOE will work with districts to review any additional flexibility that may be required.

How should schools and districts document students who do not participate in testing due to the pandemic?

Schools and districts can document students who do not participate in testing due to the pandemic utilizing the same process they use to document students who opt-out of or otherwise do not participate in testing.

This summer, the Non-Participation Application will include a COVID reason to document students who did not participate in testing due to the pandemic. The COVID reason can be used if a student received 100% virtual instruction *during all testing windows* and declined to attend in-person to participate in testing. The reason can also be used in other cases where COVID precludes participation, such as quarantine or COVID-related illness, where the student does not return to school during the testing window to participate in a make-up session. Essentially, the COVID reason should be used any time a student did not participate *solely due to COVID* but otherwise would have participated. The COVID reason is separate from the medical emergency and opt-out reasons, which should still be used when applicable.

What accountability and school identification requirements are waived?

This approved waiver waives the following accountability and school identification requirements in ESEA sections 1111(c)(4) and 1111(d)(2)(C)-(D): the requirements that a State measure progress toward long-term goals and measurements of interim progress; meaningfully differentiate, on an annual basis, all public schools, including by adjusting the Academic Achievement indicator based on a participation rate below 95 percent; and identify schools for comprehensive, targeted, and additional targeted support and improvement based on data from the 2020-2021 school year.

Will there be a 2021 College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI)?

No, GaDOE will not calculate a 2021 CCRPI summary score for the state, school districts, or schools. However, some CCRPI-related data, such as achievement rates, participation rates, and graduation rates, for example, will be calculated and publicly reported. Data will be reported through data files, Georgia Insights, and the Report Card rather than the CCRPI reporting system.

How does this waiver impact CSI/TSI identifications?

Schools will not be newly identified for Comprehensive Support and Improvement (CSI), Targeted Support and Improvement (TSI), or Additional Targeted Support and Improvement (ATSI) using 2020-2021 data. The schools that were identified for support in 2019-2020 will again maintain that status in the 2021-2022 school year. The one exception is CSI schools that were identified for low graduation rate may exit if the exit criteria is met. Districts and schools

will continue to receive services and supports from GaDOE's Office of School Improvement and the RESAs.

GaDOE will next identify CSI, TSI, and ATSI schools in the fall of 2022 using data from the 2021-2022 school year.

What report card requirements are waived?

This approved waiver waives the following report card provisions related to accountability in ESEA section 1111(h) based on data from the 2020-2021 school year:

- Section 1111(h)(1)(C)(i)(I)-(IV) and (VI) (*Accountability system description, other than the list of comprehensive, targeted, and additional targeted support and improvement schools*).
- Section 1111(h)(1)(C)(iii)(I) (*Other Academic indicator results for schools that are not high schools*).
- Section 1111(h)(1)(C)(v) (*School Quality or Student Success indicator results*).
- Section 1111(h)(1)(C)(vi) (*Progress toward meeting long-term goals and measurements of interim progress*).
- Section 1111(h)(2)(C) with respect, at the local educational agency (LEA) and school levels, to all waived requirements in section 1111(h)(1)(C).

GaDOE has communicated these changes to GOSA, the state agency that oversees the report card.

What data will be publicly reported?

Receipt of this waiver requires that the state make publicly available chronic absenteeism data, disaggregated by subgroup, as well as data on student and/or teacher access to technology devices and high-speed internet, disaggregated by subgroup, to the extent such data are available. Additional information, such as assessment results and participation rates, will be reported. GaDOE may calculate and report additional data to provide context to 2020-2021 achievement data.