



Should Arkansas Test in Spring 2021?

Every school in the state has faced an unprecedented disruption that began in the spring of 2020 and has continued throughout the current year. As the public health community tackles the questions around the short- and long-term effects of COVID-19, educators and policy makers are faced with determining the impact of the virus on student learning. With 20% of Arkansas students learning off-site, it is important for school staff to understand and be able to communicate the measures put in place so that all students can participate in spring testing.

Understanding the extent to which learning has been successful is an essential component of addressing the effects of the pandemic on our students. Spring testing allows the state, districts, and schools the opportunity to “take a snapshot” of learning to identify and track progress and inform interventions.

While summative testing is a federal and state requirement for accountability purposes, the focus for Arkansas spring testing is NOT on “accountability,” but on the summative data to inform educational leaders, policy-makers, and families about the impact of COVID-19 on the academic growth of students.

With the support of Governor Asa Hutchinson, the Arkansas Division of Elementary and Secondary Education (DESE) is seeking legislation to waive the A-F state rating scale for the 2020-2021 school year. Furthermore, DESE is providing flexibilities that will allow districts the ability to implement additional health and safety measures and follow health guidance during test administration.

Frequently Asked Questions

Families and educators have many questions about this year’s administration of statewide assessments. The short Q&A below provides answers to five main questions regarding testing.

Why should Arkansas students take standardized tests?

- State testing, which typically occurs in the spring of each school year, is a comprehensive assessment that informs parents, educators, and policy makers on how well Arkansas students are performing each year.
- While state tests are not the only measurements used to determine this, they are very important tools for parents and educators that can be used to identify how much a student knows – and does not know – in relation to key subject areas (English, Math, Reading, Science, and Writing).
- When consistently administered each year, test results can be compared to previous years’ results to provide a bigger picture of what a student has learned over time.



This helps educators and districts develop plans for how to mitigate learning loss by providing additional, targeted support to help students be successful.

- Think of state testing like an annual health exam: You need to know what is working and what is not working, so you can make changes – if needed – to improve your health. Student assessments provide that information about student learning.

Is testing required by the state and federal government?

- Yes, annual statewide testing is a federal and state requirement.
- While testing is a legal requirement, the focus should always be on students. Testing gives parents and educators the opportunity to determine if a student is meeting learning expectations, which will help them be successful in college, career, and life.

How has COVID-19 impacted state testing?

- Because of COVID-19, state testing was not conducted in the spring of 2020. As a result, critical information about measures of student learning for the 2019-2020 school year is unavailable.
- COVID-19 continues to disrupt the 2020-2021 school year, as many students have pivoted to remote learning this school year.
- Statewide testing will occur this spring. Testing on site is the best way to preserve the validity of the tests.
- The results will reflect student learning over the last two years, as well as the impact of COVID-19 on the academic growth of students.

What [safety measures](#) will be implemented to protect students from COVID during testing?

- The safety of students and staff has been, and will remain, the highest priority for school administrators.
- Safety protocols that follow Arkansas Department of Health guidelines (the use of face masks, social distancing, and proper disinfecting of classrooms and learning materials) will be followed. Parents are encouraged to discuss concerns with their child's school.
- DESE is providing districts an extended testing window, flexible scheduling options, and expanded testing cohorts to allow for smaller testing groups at specific times.

What other flexibilities do schools have when testing students this spring?

- Saturday testing
- After-hours testing
- Testing at alternate locations
- Separate testing options for remote students and onsite students