



February 15, 2019

Dear Parents,

May the peace of Christ be with all of you!

This spring, along with our five other sister dioceses and the Archdiocese of Miami, the schools in the Diocese of Orlando will administer the Terra Nova Third Edition Complete Battery test. The Catholic schools in the state of Florida have been administering the Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS) in past years; but after extensive review, the decision was made to migrate to the Terra Nova assessment ultimately because it was a better fit for the needs of our students and teachers. In the Diocese of Orlando, we take great pride in preparing our students to be faith-filled leaders as they move from school to college and the workforce. It is our mission to ensure that we bring to fullness all the gifts and talents (emotional, social, spiritual, intellectual and physical) that God has blessed your child(ren) with in our care.

As recommended by Terra Nova and the Office of Catholic Schools, this first administration of the test should be considered a baseline by which *future* growth can be measured. The ITBS and the Terra Nova are two different assessments, so it will not be appropriate to try and compare last year's test to this year's in order to show growth. It is also important to note any standardized test presents a single-day snapshot in the academic progress of children. It should be just one of several ways in which your child's growth and progress can be measured. All assessment, including standardized test results, comprises the data that we use to inform and revise classroom instruction in order to better meet the needs of your children.

In this letter I have also included an attachment with more specific details regarding Diocesan policy related to standardized testing, which may help answer other possible questions. Should you have questions or concerns about your child's academic progress, please do not hesitate to contact your child(ren)'s teacher or principal. He/she will be better able to review all assessments to more clearly determine your child's current growth and progress.

The Office of Catholic Schools in the Diocese of Orlando is committed to educational excellence, both in our Catholic faith and in academic performance.

Blessings,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Henry Fortier".

Henry Fortier
Secretary for Education/
Superintendent of Catholic Schools

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of heaven belongs to such as these." - Matthew 19:14



Parent Guide to Standardized Achievement Testing for schools in the Diocese of Orlando

All elementary schools in the Diocese of Orlando administer standardized achievement testing. Beginning in the Spring of 2019, we will administer the Terra Nova – Complete Battery achievement test which replaces the IOWA. Also, as part of the Terra Nova testing package, the CoGat cognitive abilities test administered to our third and 6th graders will be replaced with the Terra Nova InView.

Standardized tests provide an indication of how much knowledge a student has accumulated at a given point in his or her schooling in relation to other children of the same age in schools, both public and private across the state and nation. This information does not drive the academic programs in our schools nor is it used to evaluate schools, principals, or faculty; rather, we use the information to inform and assure that all aspects of the curriculum are taught and to provide insight as to the areas needing additional instruction toward student mastery.

Standardized achievement test results can affirm your child's learning progress. As a parent, if testing indicates that a child is struggling in certain areas, we will be able to provide additional support and use different methods of instruction to help the child gain necessary skills in partnership with your child's school and teacher(s).

In order to support increased understanding of standardized testing in our Diocese, we offer the following guide.

WHAT ARE STANDARDIZED TESTS?

A standardized test is an objective test that is given and scored in a uniform manner.

- Standardized tests are developed by educational testing experts. They are carefully constructed and items are selected after trials for appropriateness and difficulty, to make sure the results are accurate and meaningful.
- All students who take the same version of a standardized test will have the same conditions and the same amount of time to complete the test. If your student has an Educational Psychological Evaluation, and/or Individual Education Plan (IEP) that recommends testing conditions for standardized tests, those recommendations are considered as appropriate.
- Standardized tests usually assess student skills and knowledge on a broad level and may test all academic areas at the same time (math, reading, science, etc.)

ARE THERE DIFFERENT KINDS OF STANDARDIZED TESTS?

There are many kinds of standardized tests that are used for a variety of purposes with both children and adults. The Terra Nova, like the IOWA is a national norm-referenced test. Norm-referenced tests measure basic concepts and skills commonly taught in

schools throughout the country. These tests are not designed to measure a specific curriculum, but rather the knowledge generally taught at a particular grade level. Results from a norm-referenced test compare a student's performance to a national reference group (the "norm") of students at the same grade. Individual results on these tests are usually reported as a percentile.

- A percentile rank indicates the percentage of the norm group obtaining scores equal to or less than the tests-taker's score. *A percentile score does not refer to the percentage of questions answered correctly.* Instead, it indicates the test-taker's standing relative to the norm group standard.

WHAT STANDARDIZED ACHIEVEMENT TESTS CAN AND CANNOT DO

Remember that a standardized achievement test cannot measure the sum total of your child's progress. It is only one assessment tool designed to measure a certain set of skills.

Achievement Tests Can:

- Measure your child's ability to recall certain facts, basic skills, and concepts common to the grade tested
- Compare your child's scores with other students' scores.
- Assess your child's year-to-year development of learning, if the same test is used for several years.
- Help you determine your child's academic strengths and weaknesses in order to identify areas for support or greater challenge.

Achievement Tests Can't:

- Tell you if your child has achieved academically to the level of his ability.
- Measure skills and abilities not specifically tested; i.e. organizational skills, study habits, etc.
- Be used in isolation to measure the totality of your child's progress.

INTERPRETING THE SCORES

- Raw Scores:
A raw score is the number of items answered correctly on a given test. Raw scores by themselves have little or no meaning. A child's Raw Score (number correct) is compared to the original group of students of the same age who first took the test. The averages of this original group are called the "Norms". Norm-referenced test scores compare a child's raw score to the norm group. Next, a child's raw scores are converted into scaled scores, grade equivalents, percentiles and stanines.
- Scaled Score:
A scaled score is a mathematical transformation of a raw score. Scaled scores are useful when comparing test results over time. Most standardized achievement test batteries provide scaled scores for such purposes. Several different methods of scaling exist, but each is intended to provide a continuous score scale across the different forms and levels of a test series.

- Grade-Equivalent:
This is the most commonly misunderstood term in interpreting test scores. The first digit represents the year of the grade level and the digit after the decimal represents the month of that grade level. If a 2nd grader gets a 5.4, it does not mean the child is ready for the 5th grade. It just means that an average 5th grader would have scored as well on the same test. It also lets you know the 2nd grader mastered the material very well and answered most of the questions correctly.
- Percentile:
This score ranks individuals within a group on a scale of 1-99 with 50 being average. There isn't a 100th percentile because a child can't do better than himself. A percentile rank of 75 means the student scored better than 75 percent of the other students in his or her norm group, and 25 percent scored as well or better than your student. *It does not mean the student got 75% of the items correct.* Percentile does not refer to the percent of questions that were answered correctly.
- Stanine:
This term comes from the combination of the words "standard of nine". It rates a child's achievement on a scale of 1-9 based on a coarse grouping of the scores. In general, a stanine of 1, 2 or 3 indicates below average achievement. A stanine of 4, 5 or 6 indicates average achievement, while 7, 8 or 9 indicate above average.

DIOCESAN GUIDELINES FOR TESTING ACCOMMODATIONS AND/OR SUPPORT

What are "accommodations?"

Accommodations are intended to reduce or even eliminate the effects of a student's disability. Accommodations **do not** reduce learning expectations. Typical accommodations are practices and procedures in the areas of:

- Presentation
- Response
- Setting, and
- Timing/scheduling

What are "modifications?"

Modification changes *what* a student is taught or expected to learn whereas accommodations change *how* a student learns the material. Modification changes the learning expectation; accommodations do not.

Typical modifications may include:

- An alternate standardized assessment in place of the Terra Nova standardized test

- Limited content or curriculum tested; i.e. only Math and/or Reading in place of a full battery
- Test given at a grade level different than the child's actual grade placement

RECEIVING ACCOMMODATIONS OR MODIFICATIONS FOR TAKING THE TERRA NOVA TESTING BATTERY

1. What documentation is specifically needed to allow accommodations or modifications for the Terra Nova- Complete Battery?

- IEP/Service Plan or 504
- Private psychological-educational evaluation

*Accommodations or modifications are **ONLY** allowed when specifically indicated through testing via professional evaluation completed as part of the IDEA Child Find process, by the public school District, or through a private psychological-educational evaluation.*

School-developed support plans are allowable for day-to-day instructional support; however, for standardized testing, the above is required.

2. What accommodations are appropriate if indicated on the appropriate documentation?

The most common accommodations provided by our schools include:

- Additional time
- Verbal administration
- Alternate setting

*Accommodations are **ONLY** allowed if specifically articulated on an IEP/ISP or 504 **OR** are specifically stated within the private psychological-educational evaluation. For example, if the child's IEP/ISP indicates extra time, then extra time is provided. If the private psychological-educational evaluation indicates verbal administration of the test, then that is provided.*

If there is no mention of testing accommodations, then none are provided.

*Special note: Extra time is very specific – it is time and a half. If the test is 30 minutes, then 45 minutes are given. The allotted extra time is **not** until the child completes the test.*

3. What *modifications* are appropriate?

*Modifications should **only** be used for standardized testing if specifically stated in the IEP/ISP or private psychoeducational evaluation. Modifications change the actual learning expectation; therefore, they impact the scoring of the test.*

4. How are the testing needs of students that are non-English-speaking, Limited English Proficient, English Language Learners (ELL) addressed?

*Students that are limited-English proficient must be identified through the PHLOTE Survey (**Primary Home Language Other Than English**) given to parents to be completed as part of the registration packet. The count of PHLOTE*

students is provided to the LEA within 2 weeks of the start of school so that they are counted for Title III services.

ONLY those students identified through this process should be provided testing accommodations. Those accommodations include:

- Flexible Setting
- Flexible Scheduling/Additional Time

*Special note: Extra time is very specific – it is time and a half. If the test is 30 minutes, then 45 minutes are given. The allotted extra time is **not** until the child completes the test.*

- Assistance in the heritage language
- Approved Dictionary – ELLs may use an approved English-to-heritage language and/or heritage language-to-English translation dictionary. The dictionary must provide word-to-word translations only and may not contain definitions or other information.

5. What process is used for exempting students from the testing?

The Diocese of Orlando does not allow “opting out” of standardized testing. We are not testing students in a “high stakes” environment and do not use the results for evaluative purposes in terms of school or teacher performance. Rather, we use the testing data to support and inform the instructional needs of the students.

*Excluding a student from testing requires significant justification. A student who is truly unable to take the test should have considerable documentation to support the exemption. **The student’s name and reason, along with supporting documentation must be submitted to the Office of Catholic Schools prior to the administration of the exam, and include supporting documentation. Exemption is subject to Superintendent approval.***