

GEORGIA MILESTONES

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Why did Cobb students take assessments during a pandemic?

In July 2020 and again in February 2021, the Georgia Department of Education applied to the U.S. Department of Education (USED) for a waiver of high-stakes testing requirements for the 2020-2021 school year. USED denied Georgia's request for a waiver, along with similar requests from other states. Because USED did not waive or exempt federally-required assessments for the 2020-2021 school year, the Cobb County School District was required to offer the opportunity to test to all students for all required assessments.

Cobb educators do not rely solely on summative assessments like Georgia Milestones. Cobb teachers conduct formative assessments throughout the school year to determine what students know so they can tailor instruction to meet the learning needs of each student.

Why did fewer Cobb students participate in Georgia's assessments?

Overall assessment participation rates for Cobb—and the entire state of Georgia—are lower when compared to previous years, likely due to health and safety concerns associated with in-person testing. In a typical year, more than 95% of Cobb students enrolled in grades 3–8 or in EOC courses take one or more Milestones tests. Approximately 68% of Cobb students enrolled in those grades and courses took a Milestones test in 2021.

How did Georgia's students perform in 2020-2021?

While overall state performance is slightly lower, performance varies across systems and schools. For Georgia Milestones assessment administered in Spring 2021, more Cobb students (73.8%) scored in levels 2–4 than in Metro RESA (69.2%) and Georgia (68.2%).

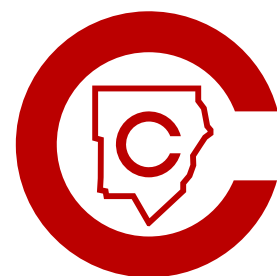
Given the magnitude of learning disruptions experienced this school year, these decreases are not particularly large, according to the Georgia Department of Education. We expect to see achievement increase at a similar rate in coming years as we return to educational environments with fewer disruptions to student learning.

How should parents use Georgia assessment results to support their children?

Cobb parents will receive an individual student report that will detail their student's performance along with summary information about aggregate performance at the school, system, and state levels. The results can provide a helpful check for where their child is excelling, as well as where they may need more support. We encourage parents to consider their child's results within the context of the variety of potential learning disruptions they may have encountered and recommend that they heavily weight the results of formative assessments administered throughout the years along with coursework and grades.

How should 2020-2021 results be interpreted?

Student results should be interpreted as one measure of a student's mastery of the knowledge and skills outlined in Georgia's academic content standards. These scores are most meaningful when considered in the context of learning and any associated extenuating factors. For example, a student's performance on Georgia Milestones may classify them as a Developing Learner, indicating the student mastered some, but not all, of the academic content standards. However, these scores cannot indicate whether the student had the opportunity to learn all of the content standards or whether, due to pandemic-related learning disruptions, the student only had the opportunity to learn some of the content standards. In the context of the pandemic, many school districts had to prioritize which content standards could be delivered.



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How should Cobb parents interpret Georgia Milestones Summaries?

When considering summary scores, Cobb families and the community are encouraged to:

1. Consider the percentage of the total population tested and take extra caution in interpretation in cases where a low percentage of the enrolled student population was tested at a given school or district.
2. Consider the representativeness and prior achievement of the tested population and take extra caution in interpretation in cases where differences indicate the students who did test this year are not representative of the total student population.
3. Avoid punitive or accountability applications of these outcomes.
4. Contextualize any changes in achievement with any local complexities systems and schools may have faced within this last year (e.g., mode of instruction, enrollment rates, attendance rates).

Were there any changes to Georgia Milestones in 2020-2021?

There were no modifications to Georgia Milestones or other state assessments related to the nature of the pandemic. Critical aspects of Georgia Milestones remain consistent despite the interruptions in learning, including: the academic content standards, the achievement standards, the administration format, and the scoring procedures and data-quality criteria.

However, some key external factors changed, which necessitates caution and context when interpreting individual or summary scores. Some examples include:

- Students received instruction in-person and virtually with some students remaining virtual for all 2020-2021.
- The contribution of EOC scores to final course grades was reduced in weight.
- Fewer students participated in this administration of Georgia Milestones as compared to prior years.

