

# A BIG WIN FOR GEORGIA STUDENTS



## Common Core Georgia Performance Standards

It is no secret that Georgia's students have been performing at the bottom of the pack. To turn things around, the State Board of Education adopted in 2010 a unique set of college- and career-ready standards called the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards. These standards were designed to prepare our students to be 21st century learners. They are higher, clearer, and more focused on the essential skills and knowledge students need in college and careers upon graduation.

The previous state standards did not equip our students with the skills necessary for success. Students were meeting benchmarks on the old state test, the Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT), but these figures were deceptive. Although more than 80% of students in every grade scored proficient on the CRCT, on the most recent Nation's Report Card, or National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), fewer than half of students scored proficient in reading and math. Georgia state assessments set the bar too low for our students, allowing some to graduate high school thinking they were prepared for success in college and careers when that was not always the case.

With the adoption of the updated standards, Georgia is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 61% of jobs in Georgia will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 34% of adults in the state currently have this credential, resulting in a 27% skills gap. By raising the bar, we can be confident that our students will be qualified to fill these jobs, contributing to the growth of our economy.

Georgia's Proficiency Rates on the 2013 Nation's Report Card (NAEP) and the 2013 Criterion Referenced Competency Test (CRCT)

	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
NAEP	39%	34%	29%	32%
CRCT	84%	93%	83%	97%



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## Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers across Georgia have been hard at work putting these higher academic goals in place. It has been a significant undertaking involving many hours of professional development, creating new curricula and teaching strategies, and developing ways to engage students more deeply than ever before.

The next phase of this work is to implement an assessment in Georgia that is more meaningful to students, teachers, and parents in determining which skills a student has or has not yet mastered in order to be prepared for college-level work. The CRCT was not able to measure these higher-level skills.

Putting better assessments in place is not enough. They need to be part of a larger system of accountability that supports student achievement and holds our schools accountable for successfully teaching the content outlined in the standards. At the heart of accountability is the need to ensure that all students across Georgia are receiving the same high-quality education. Meaningful assessments serve as school-wide academic checkups that can identify struggling students and schools in need of extra support and interventions. In addition, improved assessments can identify high-achieving students who require support to maintain their academic engagement and provide them the resources necessary to continue to help them excel.

## What Does a High-Quality Assessment Look Like?

A high-quality assessment:

- Is developed with input from academic and testing experts, as well as teachers;
- Is field-tested and reviewed before full implementation;
- Assesses a wide range of real-world skills using a variety of question formats;

- Provides detailed and timely feedback that acts as an “academic checkup”;
- Sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are not on track so interventions can be put in place; and
- Is comparable across states.

To accurately measure the skills outlined in the updated standards, Georgia developed a state-specific set of assessments aligned to the English language arts and math standards. The tests were created in partnership with Georgia teachers and state institutions of higher education. This process gave teachers a direct role in developing and reviewing the test blueprints and specifications as well as reviewing the test questions. The result was the Georgia Milestones Assessment System, a unique, comprehensive assessment that includes end-of-grade tests in math and reading for grades 3–8 and end-of-course tests in selected courses in high school. These will be given to students in spring 2015. Students will no longer simply “fill in the bubble” but instead be required to show a deeper level of understanding through extended writing tasks and multi-step questions. Results will include more than just a score; they will give an accurate picture of student strengths and weaknesses, thereby giving parents and teachers actionable data that can be used for remediation and enrichment.

During this time of transition, it is important to continue to advocate for a high-quality state test aligned to standards that can serve as a strong measuring stick of how Georgia students are doing on the path to college and careers. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the Milestones system because it includes so many of the criteria that characterize a high-quality test and result in higher quality instruction for all students. As supporters, we need to ensure that our state test not only accurately measures college and career readiness, but also possesses the characteristics that will make it a useful tool to help students improve.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is the difference between curriculum and standards?

- Standards are a set of guidelines for what students are expected to know and be able to do at specific points in their education. Standards provide the foundation for key components of the education system, including curricula, instructional materials, teacher training, and assessments.
- A curriculum is the course of study covering the standards. It is set by local school districts and includes the lesson plans, programs, and textbooks that teachers use to teach the content and skills outlined in the standards.

### 2. If students are learning with different curricula, how can they take the same test?

- Although teachers use different materials and curricula, students still learn the same skills outlined in the standards. Teachers can be creative in their instruction, designing lessons to best reach their students and creating a classroom where all students can achieve.

### 3. Will the new test replace the old state test?

- Yes, Georgia Milestones will replace the previous CRCT exams in grades 3–8 and high school.

### 4. How will test scores impact schools and districts?

- Georgia Milestones is one measure used in the College and Career Ready Performance Index reports for all public school districts and schools.

### 5. How will test scores impact teachers?

- One component of a teacher's evaluation is student growth, which includes Milestones scores if the teacher instructs a tested course (only 30% of teachers do). Student growth makes up 50% of an evaluation.



## Why Support the Common Core Georgia Performance Standards?

- They are more rigorous academic standards that prepare all students for success after high school.
- They emphasize real-world skills, like critical thinking and problem-solving.
- They are comparable across states.

## Why Do We Need Good Tests?

- They give us an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- They ensure all students are held to the same expectations.
- They identify struggling students so they can get the help they need.

## 6. How will test scores impact students?

- For high school students, Milestones tests will replace final exams and count as 20% of a student's final grade.

## 7. What kind of data will be collected? Will it be released?

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Georgia is required to collect data on the performance of schools. Data collected will include student test scores and information such as attendance, support services, and academic growth. The state will not release any personally identifiable student information. *Only individuals who interact with students on a daily basis, such as teachers and parents, are allowed to see student-specific information.* Federal law protects the privacy of student information and education records through the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The only information that will be publicly available will contain aggregate data for schools, districts, and subgroups.

## 9. How were teachers involved in the test development process?

- Teachers were heavily involved in test development. All items were reviewed by committee at least two times prior to appearing on the test. Teachers also had direct input into the blueprints and specifications of the test.

## 10. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Georgia Milestones is an online assessment, but will be phased in gradually. The goal is for 100% of schools to be using the online version by the fifth year of testing.
- Although it will take some time to ensure that every school has the necessary hardware and meets the technology requirements, this is a smart investment. Technology is not going away. Ensuring that all students, regardless of geography or household income, have equal access to technology is critical to preparing students for a 21st century competitive workforce.

## 12. Where can I go for more information?

- [www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/Georgia-Milestones-Assessment-System.aspx](http://www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/Georgia-Milestones-Assessment-System.aspx)
- [www.georgiastandards.org/Common-Core/Pages/default.aspx](http://www.georgiastandards.org/Common-Core/Pages/default.aspx)
- [www.BusinessForCore.org](http://www.BusinessForCore.org)

