

# A BIG WIN FOR MAINE STUDENTS



## The Maine Learning Results

In 2013, 75% of high-growth and high-wage jobs in Maine required at least a two-year degree. However, only 36% of adults in the state had such a credential, resulting in a 39% skills gap. The number of jobs requiring a postsecondary credential will only continue to grow. In a 2010 survey of executives, 90% said that skills like communication, collaboration, and critical thinking were crucial job skills, yet only 50% rated their own employees as above average in those categories. It is critical that Maine students graduate from high school with the skills they need to succeed in college and to fill the jobs of the future—but too many students are not on track to do so.

Maine's Proficiency Performance on the 2013 Nation's Report Card

Year	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2011	45%	32%	39%	39%
2013	45%	43%	37%	45%

On the Nation's Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP), less than half of 4th and 8th grade students demonstrated proficiency in reading and math. In fall 2013, 46% of freshmen attending Maine community colleges and 11% of freshmen enrolled in the state university system had to take a remedial class because they lacked the skills to successfully complete college-level work. Recognizing this disconnect, the State Board of Education updated the state's academic standards in 2011. The result was a set of rigorous college- and career-ready standards in English language arts (ELA) and math that would ensure students were graduating prepared with the skills they need to succeed.

Since 1990, Maine has been continuously improving its academic standards. This has been a longstanding process that has included the input of Maine educators, academics, and content experts. Prior to the 2011 revisions, the standards did not provide students with the real-world and critical thinking skills they needed for success. According to a 2010 report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, the ELA standards were missing up to a third of the most essential content, and the math standards were missing as much as half of the most critical content. On the U.S Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, Maine's standards received a D in rigor. With the adoption of higher standards, Maine is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential.



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## Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers across Maine have been hard at work preparing for and implementing the standards. The 2013–14 school year marked the first year in which all teachers began instructing the content outlined in the standards. It has been a significant undertaking involving countless hours of professional development, curricula alignment, collaboration, and learning strategies to engage students more deeply than ever before.

The next phase of this work is to implement an improved test that is more meaningful to students, teachers, and parents in determining which skills a student has or has not yet mastered. The state needs a test that can measure the critical thinking and problem solving skills that our students need to succeed—and existing state tests cannot evaluate this level of learning. Improved assessments present an opportunity to move beyond tests that simply measure rote memorization skills to ones that mirror the higher standards and provide teachers with valuable information on how effectively they are teaching and students are learning.

Putting better assessments in place needs to be part of a larger system of accountability that supports student achievement and holds 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 Maine receive the same high-quality education. Meaningful tests 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 with the resources necessary to continue to excel.

For the past four years, teams of academics, testing experts, and teachers have been working tirelessly

to create two testing options aligned to the higher standards: PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. These two tests were field tested in spring 2014 in 35 states, including Maine, where more than 25,000 students in 180 schools took the Smarter Balanced field test.

The tests aim to do the following:

- Accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness.
- Assess a wide range of skills, including critical thinking and writing skills.
- Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning.

Maine is a governing member of the Smarter Balanced consortium. Through this partnership, Smarter Balanced will develop aligned assessments in math and English language arts for students in grades 3–8 and 11. Students will begin taking the tests this spring as part of the Maine Educational Assessment (MEA). These computer-adaptive tests measure the content, concepts, and skills outlined in the Maine Learning Results. The tests will adjust the difficulty of questions based on previous student responses to give a more accurate measure of which skills a student has mastered. Along with end-of-year tests, the Smarter Balanced system also contains a Digital Library with resources, classroom activities, and professional development for teachers. Teachers will have access to class activities that they can do throughout the year to ensure students are keeping pace. These activities serve as an academic checkup, providing teachers with feedback to guide their instruction.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how Maine students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the Smarter Balanced tests because they meet so many of the criteria of a high-quality aligned test. As advocates, we need to ensure that our state tests

accurately measure college and career readiness and have these characteristics to serve as a useful tool to benefit students.

## A High-Quality Assessment:

- Is developed with input from teachers, as well as academics and testing experts.
- Assesses a wide range of real-world skills using a variety of question formats.
- Includes classroom activities that act as academic checkups to ensure that students are keeping pace.
- Is field tested and reviewed before full implementation.
- Provides detailed and timely feedback that sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are not on track so that interventions can be put in place.
- Is comparable across states.

## Frequently Asked Questions

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

- 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, but they are not curricula, instructional materials, teacher training, or 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 establishing a classroom where all students can achieve.



## The Maine Learning Results:

- Are more rigorous academic standards that prepare all students for success after high school.
- Emphasize real-world skills such as critical thinking and problem solving.
- Are comparable across states.

## Better assessments:

- Give an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- Ensure that all students are held to the same expectations.
- Identify struggling students so that they can get the help they need.
- Identify high-achieving students to provide them with the resources necessary to continue to excel.

## Smarter Balanced:

- A group of states working together to develop high-quality, computer-adaptive assessments that measure college and career readiness in both math and English language arts.

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

- Yes. The Smarter Balanced assessments will replace New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) tests for math and English language arts in grades 3–8 and the SAT in grade 11.

### 4. Will annual test scores impact schools and districts?

- School-wide test results will be used as one measure for school accountability. Just as tests are used as academic checkups for individual students, they also serve as checkups for our schools. Districts need to identify struggling students and schools in need of support so that interventions can be put in place to ensure that all students across Maine receive a high-quality education.

### 5. Will test scores impact teachers?

- Student learning and growth is one of the factors used in teacher evaluations. Growth in student achievement is measured based on performance on the state assessments at two points in time. School districts will decide what percentage of the total evaluation student learning and growth will comprise. If a district has not made a decision by June 1, 2015, the default percentage will be 20%.

### 6. What is proficiency-based learning? How do the aligned assessments impact it?

- Proficiency-based learning requires that students master skills they are expected to learn before they progress to the next lesson, move on to the next grade, or receive a diploma. The goal is to ensure that students graduate with the knowledge and skills they need for career training, college, and life.
- Districts can choose how students will demonstrate proficiency in each area. The Smarter Balanced assessments are one way that students can demonstrate proficiency, but there are a variety of other classroom-based tasks that can be used as well.

### 7. How will test scores impact students?

- There are no testing requirements for promotion or graduation.

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

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Maine is required to collect data on school performance. Aggregate data collected includes 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?

- Maine teachers were involved in a review of the test questions for content, bias/sensitivity, and accessibility. They also assisted with the development of learning resources in the Digital Library, an online collection of aligned resources to support teachers as they adjust to teaching the standards.

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

- [www.smarterbalanced.org](http://www.smarterbalanced.org)
- [www.maine.gov/doe/assessment/math-ela/index.html](http://www.maine.gov/doe/assessment/math-ela/index.html)
- [www.BusinessForCore.org](http://www.BusinessForCore.org)