

A BIG WIN FOR MISSISSIPPI STUDENTS



Mississippi College and Career Readiness Standards

It is no secret that Mississippi students have long performed at the bottom of the pack compared to their peers across the country. Mississippi students continue to achieve among the lowest scores in the nation. On the most recent Nation's Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress), less than one-quarter of students were proficient in math and reading—a troubling statistic. We must come together as business leaders and advocates across the state to support reforms that raise the bar to ensure that all students receive a world-class education.

In 2010, the Mississippi State Board of Education adopted a set of rigorous academic standards in math and English language arts (ELA) to ensure that students have the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in

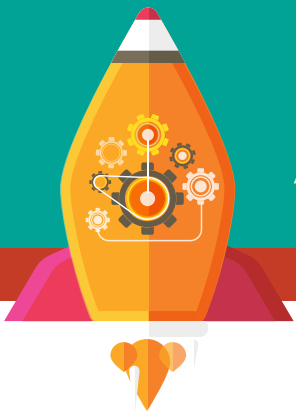
college, careers, and life. The standards encourage the critical thinking, problem solving, and teamwork skills that are characteristic of a 21st century student. Teachers began instructing the content outlined in the standards in the 2011–2012 school year, and the standards were fully implemented by the 2013–2014 school year.

The previous state standards did not provide students with the skills they needed for successful futures. They were vague, repetitive, and difficult to understand. The ELA standards were described as some of the worst in the nation. On the U.S. Chamber of Commerce 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, Mississippi's education system received an F for postsecondary and workforce readiness and for academic achievement, and the previous state standards received a C in rigor. In 2012, 55% of first-year students at Mississippi state universities had to enroll in a remedial math course and 19% in a remedial English course because they lacked the skills needed to successfully complete college-level work.

With the adoption of higher standards, Mississippi is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. Job outlooks indicate that by 2020, 57% of jobs in Mississippi will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 32% of adults in the state currently have such a credential, resulting in a 25% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to helping close this gap.

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

	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
Proficiency	25%	21%	21%	20%
Rank Among States	50th	48th	49th	50th



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Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

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 mastered. We need a test that can measure the critical thinking and problem solving skills that our students need in order to succeed. Existing state tests cannot evaluate this level of learning, whereas improved assessments present an opportunity to move beyond “bubble 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 Mississippi receive the same high-quality education. Meaningful tests serve as school-wide checkups that can identify struggling students and schools in need of extra support so that interventions can be put in place. 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 new testing options aligned to these 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 Mississippi, where students took the PARCC 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 real-world critical thinking and writing skills.
- Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning.

Mississippi served on the governing board of PARCC beginning in 2010. In early 2015, the Board of Education voted to withdraw from the PARCC consortium and begin a competitive and transparent bidding process for a new state assessment. The PARCC English language arts and math tests will still be administered in spring 2015 to students in grades 3–8 and to high school students in Algebra I and English II, but the board will issue a request for proposals (RFP) to select a new assessment to be used beginning in the 2015–16 school year. The primary goal of the State Board of Education is to find a test that is cost effective, fully aligned to Mississippi’s standards, and includes a variety of items, including multiple choice, constructed response, writing, technology-enhanced, and performance tasks. The Department of Education plans to present the selected proposal to the Board of Education in April 2015.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state tests a strong measuring stick of how Mississippi students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. 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 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.
- Includes formative or interim assessments that act as academic checkups to make sure students are keeping pace.

- Provides detailed and timely feedback that sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are struggling 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, 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 establishing a classroom where all students can achieve.

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

- Yes. In 2015, the PARCC test will replace the previous Mississippi Curriculum Tests in reading and math in grades 3–8 and in Algebra I and English II in high school. A request for proposals has been issued to select the test that will be given in subsequent years.

4. Will test scores impact schools and districts?

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



The Mississippi College- and Career-Ready Standards:

- Emphasize real-world skills, like critical thinking and problem solving.
- Raise the bar to ensure that all students receive a world-class education.
- Are comparable to other states.

Better Assessments:

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

PARCC:

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

5. How will test scores impact teachers?

- During the 2014–15 school year, for teachers of tested courses, individual student growth on the state test accounts for 30% of the evaluation, and school-wide growth counts for 20%. For teachers of non-tested courses, a comprehensive school-wide growth measure will constitute 50% of a teacher's evaluation.

6. How will test scores impact students?

- State statute requires that third grade students who do not achieve proficiency on the state reading test will not be promoted to fourth grade. The state will not use the PARCC test, but will use an alternate measure for the 2014–15 school year.
- Students need to pass end-of-course tests in order to graduate. If students cannot achieve proficiency on the state test, there are alternative testing options for them to demonstrate mastery.

7. What kind of professional development did teachers receive in preparation for the new standards?

- The State Department of Education has made a concerted effort to train teachers and administrators across the state since the standards were adopted in 2010. The training continues with regional multi-day training sessions, summer boot camps, as well as the use of content specialists to provide direct support to school districts.

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

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Mississippi is required to collect data on the performance of schools. Aggregate 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, district, and subgroups.

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

- Mississippi teachers participated in the PARCC Education Leader Cadre, a group of teachers who met to share best practices, engage in reviewing PARCC state-developed instructional materials, and participate as active leaders in state and local implementation.
- ELA, math, and special education teachers were involved in operational working groups to review and construct test items and develop accommodations for students with disabilities and English language learners.

10. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students need to be familiar with computers. Paper and pencil versions will be available during the first three years of the new testing for schools that cannot meet the technology requirement.
- While it may take time to ensure that every school has the hardware necessary 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.

11. Where can I go for more information?

- www.commoncorems.org
- www.mde.k12.ms.us
- www.parcconline.org
- www.BusinessForCore.org