

A BIG WIN FOR NORTH CAROLINA STUDENTS

Next Generation Aligned Assessments



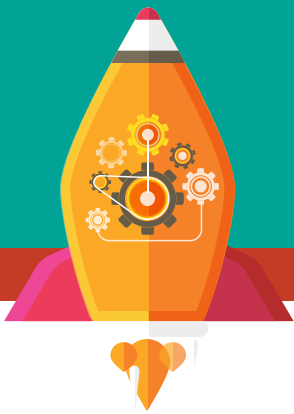
For a long time, North Carolina students were led to believe that they were being prepared for success in college and careers. Although students were scoring proficient on the state assessment, the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP, also known as the Nation's Report Card) told a different story, as seen in the table. On the 2013 NAEP test, less than half of North Carolina students scored proficient on the 4th and 8th grade math and reading tests. Using results from an international math assessment, 44% of North Carolina 8th grade students scored proficient in math compared to 84% on the state test—a 40% difference. This illustrates a notable misrepresentation of students' true skills.

North Carolina's Performance on the Nation's Report Card

2013 Assessment	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
Rank Among States	17th	28th	23rd	35th
Proficiency	45%	35%	36%	33%

North Carolina state assessments do not accurately measure whether our students are mastering the skills they need to be successful in college and careers. In 2012, the state's on-time high school graduation rate was 80% and yet that same year, 63% of students in the North Carolina community college system had to enroll in a remedial course because they lacked the skills needed to complete college-level work.

With the adoption of the North Carolina Career and College Ready Standards in 2010, we began challenging our students with more rigorous tasks that focus on the math and English language arts skills they need most. By 2020, 63% of jobs in North Carolina will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 36% of adults in the state currently have this credential, resulting in a 27% skills gap. We must bridge this gap in order to secure the pipeline of talent that will attract and spur the growth of good jobs. By raising the bar, we can be confident that our students will be qualified to fill these jobs, contributing to the prosperity of our economy.



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Higher Standards Require Rigorous Assessments

The adoption of high-quality assessments aligned to the updated state standards is one of the most important steps for the future of education in North Carolina. Until then, the state will not achieve the full benefits of the new standards, including college and workforce readiness.

Improved assessments must be part of a larger system of accountability that supports student achievement. These assessments hold 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 North Carolina are receiving 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 interventions can be put in place to best support students and teachers. 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 succeed.

For the past four years, teams of academic and testing experts—and, most importantly, teachers—have been working tirelessly to create two new testing options aligned to the new standards: Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. These two tests were field-tested this past spring in 35 states and Washington, D.C. The new tests aim to:

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

North Carolina is a member of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, and our teachers have played an integral part in the development and review of test items. Recently, the North Carolina State Board of Education organized a task force on assessments to review proposals from various test vendors, including Smarter Balanced. The taskforce will select a new test by May 15, 2015. It must then

be approved by the state legislature before being adopted. The legislature will also decide when the new test will be administered.

During this time of transition, it is important to continue to advocate for a high-quality state test aligned to the standards for all of North Carolina's students. We need a test that allows us to compare students not only within our state, but also to students in other states, to be confident that our students are performing at the same level as their peers across the nation.

There are many test options available, but not all are high quality, evidence-based, or fully aligned to North Carolina standards. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the Smarter Balanced assessments because they include so many of the criteria that make up a high-quality test. We cannot achieve our state's education goals until we ensure that the standards are reflected on the end-of-year tests. Aligned assessments provide professional development opportunities for teachers to perfect their practice, enable parents to have accurate information about their child's academic growth, and signal to the business community that the state is dedicated to developing its workforce.

What Does a High-Quality Assessment Look Like?

A high-quality assessment:

- Is fully aligned to North Carolina's Career and College Ready standards;
- Is available online in reading, writing, and math;
- Is comparable across states;
- Is developed with input from the academic community, testing experts, and, most importantly, 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 (interim) assessments that act as "academic checkups" to make sure students are keeping pace; and
- Provides detailed and timely feedback that sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are struggling, so interventions can be put in place to best help them.

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. What does it mean if a test is aligned?

- A test that is aligned to the standards includes the same type of tasks that students are learning in the classroom. It covers the full range of content and levels of skills that are found in the standards. Quite simply, alignment is when the assessment reflects the skills students are learning in the classroom.

4. Why is it so important to have an aligned summative test?

- The new standards are designed to focus on the skills students most need for success in college and careers. We need an evidence-based test that is aligned to the standards in order to accurately measure our students' progress.
- Adopting the North Carolina Career and College Ready Standards signaled to the education and business community that the state is dedicated to ensuring the success of our students. Administering a test that is not fully aligned to the standards means we have inaccurate measures of student progress, and undermines our efforts to achieve our state goals.

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

- Yes. The new tests will replace the end-of-grade tests in grades 3–8 and the end-of-course tests in high school.



Why Support the North Carolina Career and College Ready 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 hold all students to the same high expectations and are comparable across the state and nation.

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 schools and districts?

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

7. How will the new tests affect the state and local required tests students already have to take?

- The North Carolina State Board of Education is reviewing strategies to reduce the amount of testing for students. The new end-of-course and end-of-grade tests could replace some of the existing tests, reducing overall testing time for students.

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

- Since 2011, more than 100,000 teachers received training on the new standards. North Carolina educators also developed new lessons plans, curricula, and units aligned to the standards.

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

- North Carolina teachers were involved with the development of assessment items and performance tasks in both math and English for the pilot test given in 2014. Our teachers will also review test items and performance tasks for content, bias or sensitivity, and accessibility.

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

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, North Carolina is required to collect data on the performance of schools. Data collected will include student test scores and information such as

What is Smarter Balanced?

- Smarter Balanced is a consortium of states working together to develop high-quality assessments that measure college and career readiness in both math and English language arts.

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.

11. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students will need to be computer literate. 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 some time to ensure that every school has the hardware necessary and meets the technology requirements, computer-based testing is a smart investment. Technology is not going away. Ensuring that all students, regardless of geography, household income, or background, 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.hirestandardsnc.org
- www.smarterbalanced.org
- www.ncreadyforsuccess.com
- www.BusinessForCore.org