

# A BIG WIN FOR OKLAHOMA STUDENTS



## The Oklahoma Priority Academic Student Skills

In 2014, Oklahoma's on-time high school graduation rate was 85%—higher than many other states. Unfortunately, there was another story to be told. On the most recent Nation's Report Card, also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), less than a third of 4th and 8th grade students demonstrated proficiency in reading and math (with the exception of 4th grade math). That same year, only 23% of Oklahoma students met the college-readiness benchmarks in the four subject areas tested on the ACT (English, reading, math, and science). Currently, 40% of freshmen entering Oklahoma state institutions have to take a remedial course because they lack the skills necessary for college-level work. Clearly, students were not graduating from high school with the skills they needed for success in college and careers.

Oklahoma's Proficiency Rates on the Nation's Report Card

Year	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2011	33%	27%	27%	27%
2013	36%	30%	25%	29%

To address this disconnect, the Oklahoma Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards in math and English language arts (ELA) in 2010. However, the state legislature repealed these standards in June 2014, abandoning the hours of hard work that Oklahoma teachers had spent learning and implementing the standards in their classrooms. The state reverted to the previous standards, the Priority Academic Student Skills (PASS), for the 2014–15 school year. The PASS standards were not validated as college and career ready by the State Regents for Higher Education, the coordinating board of Oklahoma's twenty-five colleges and universities. Since their validation is needed to receive a waiver from No Child Left Behind Act requirements, Oklahoma's waiver was revoked. In October 2014, the Regents validated the PASS standards in order for the state to continue receiving the waiver. The U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2014 *Leaders and Laggards* report graded the PASS standards a D in postsecondary and workforce readiness. By reverting to the PASS standards, the state had taken a step backward in preparing its students for college and the workforce.



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Now is not the time for Oklahoma to turn its back on higher standards. By 2020, 59% of jobs in Oklahoma will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 30% of adults currently have such a credential, resulting in a 29% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to helping close this gap and ensuring that Oklahoma employers can hire Oklahoma graduates. The state needs a set of standards that focus on the real-world critical thinking and problem solving skills that will benefit students as they transition from high school to college or careers. The PASS standards simply do not achieve this goal.

## The Need for Better Assessments

To measure how well students are making progress, states must have high-quality assessments that are fully aligned to their standards. Improved assessments present an opportunity to move beyond tests that simply measure rote memorization skills to ones that 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 Oklahoma receive a 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.

## The Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test

The Oklahoma Core Curriculum Test (OCCT) is administered to students in grades 3–8 every spring. Students in high school take end-of-instruction tests in Algebra 1 and 2, Geometry, English 2 and 3, Biology 1, and U.S. History. Unlike the next-generation tests that are being



implemented in states across the nation, the OCCT does not go beyond multiple choice questions. Multiple choice questions allow for random guesswork, and only require students to select the best answer. Assessments should require students to apply critical thinking and reasoning skills, and to explain their answers in writing, as they will need to do in college and the workplace. The OCCT, however, only assesses writing in grades 5 and 8. While other states have incorporated technology into state assessments, OCCT only provides computer-based tests in grades 6–8.

It is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how Oklahoma students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. The state test should meet the criteria that make up a high-quality aligned assessment. 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.
- 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 that interventions can be put in place.
- Is comparable across states.



## Better Assessments:

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

# 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. How do 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.

## 3. Will test scores impact teachers?

- State assessment scores are not used as a measure in teacher evaluations.

## 4. How will test scores impact students?

- To earn a high school diploma, students must demonstrate proficiency on the Algebra 1 and English 2 exams, along with two other end-of-instruction tests in high school.

## 5. What kind of data is collected? Is it released?

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Oklahoma 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.

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

- [www.ok.gov/sde/office-assessmentsw](http://www.ok.gov/sde/office-assessmentsw)
- [www.BusinessForCore.org](http://www.BusinessForCore.org)