

A BIG WIN FOR SOUTH CAROLINA STUDENTS



South Carolina College- and Career-Ready Standards

In 2013, South Carolina's on-time high school graduation rate was 78%—lower than the national average of about 80%. That same year, more than two-thirds of students in the 4th and 8th grades demonstrated proficiency in reading and math on the South Carolina Palmetto Assessment of State Standards (SCPASS). However, results from the Nation's Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP) painted a less promising picture: less than a third demonstrated proficiency, with the exception of 4th grade math. In 2013, only 22% of South Carolina students who took the ACT met all four college readiness benchmarks.

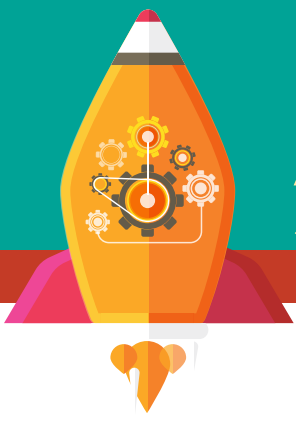
South Carolina's Proficiency Rates on the 2013 Nation's Report Card and SCPASS

Assessment	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
NAEP	35%	28%	31%	29%
SCPASS	80%	79%	70%	67%

Although students were graduating high school and achieving proficiency on the SCPASS, they were not hitting the mark on the national assessment and were not adequately prepared for college and the workforce. In 2011, the State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards in English language arts (ELA) and math to help ensure students were learning the skills most essential for success after high school graduation.

In 2014, Governor Haley signed a bill into law that abolished the Common Core State Standards in South Carolina. The State Department of Education established a team of math and ELA teachers and experts to draft a new set of college- and career-ready standards to implement in the 2015–16 school year. These standards were to be South Carolina-specific yet would use other states' college- and career-ready standards as a model. A draft was open to comments from the public, whose feedback informed a final version presented to the State Board of Education. The State Board of Education and the Education Oversight Committee approved the revised standards in March 2015.

With the adoption of college- and career-ready standards, South Carolina is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 60% of jobs in the state will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 34% of adults in South Carolina currently have such a credential, resulting in a 26% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to helping close this gap.



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Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

The next phase of this work is to implement an improved assessment 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 South Carolina 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.

In 2014, South Carolina chose to administer ACT assessments. Students in grades 3–8 will take the ACT Aspire in ELA, science, and math beginning in spring 2015. The ACT Aspire testing system contains interim classroom assessments that can be given at various points throughout the year as academic checkups to identify when students require additional supports or challenges. Test questions will no longer simply require students to fill in a bubble and will instead require them to think critically, analyze, and explain their reasoning, giving a more accurate picture of

student progress. Students in grade 11 will take the ACT WorkKeys, a job skills assessment that measures reading, math, and the ability to locate information.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how South Carolina students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the ACT tests because they meet so many of the criteria that make up 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 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 ensure that students are keeping pace.
- 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, 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. The ACT Aspire will replace the SCPASS in grades 3–8 in ELA and math.

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 South Carolina receive a high-quality education.

5. How will test scores impact students?

- The ACT scores in other grades will not be used to calculate students' final grade, promotion, or graduation.



Better Assessments:

- Give us 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.

ACT Aspire:

- Is a standards-based assessment system that gauges student progression from grades 3–8 in English, reading, writing, mathematics, and science.

ACT WorkKeys:

- Is a job skills assessment system that measures reading and math proficiency and helps ensure students understand the skill levels required for the careers they are considering.

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

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, South Carolina 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.

7. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students need to be computer literate. Both the ACT Aspire and the ACT WorkKeys are administered online.
- While it may take time to ensure that every school has the hardware necessary and meets the technology requirements, online testing is a smart investment. Technology is not going away. Ensuring that all students have equal access to technology is critical to preparing students for a 21st century competitive workforce.

8. Where can I go for more information?

- www.ed.sc.gov/agency/programs-services/214
- www.BusinessForCore.org

