

# A BIG WIN FOR UTAH STUDENTS



## Utah Core State Standards

In the past decade Utah schools have seen a great amount of growth. The 2014 on-time graduation rate was 83%, a 14% increase in eight years. But on the most recent Nation's Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress), less than half of students in the 4th and 8th grades demonstrated proficiency in reading and math. And last year, only 25% of high school graduates met college-readiness benchmarks on the ACT. To address these shortcomings, in 2010, the State Board of Education adopted a set of college- and career-ready standards in English language arts (ELA) and math that are higher and clearer than the old standards to provide students with the skills they need for the future.

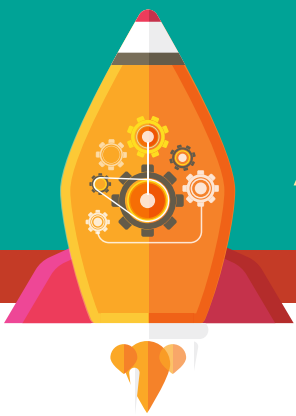
Utah's Proficiency Performance on the Nation's Report Card

Year	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2011	43%	33%	35%	35%
2013	44%	37%	36%	39%

Utah's previous math standards were well designed and rigorous, but did not focus strongly on arithmetic in the early grades. The ELA standards lacked rigor and often focused more on strategies than outcomes and expectations for students. In the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, the previous Utah standards received only a C in rigor. In early 2015, the Governor's Standards Review Committee released their report which reaffirmed that Utah's improved Core State Standards were more rigorous and would better prepare students for college and careers.

Teachers across Utah have been hard at work putting these standards in place since their adoption in 2010. It has been a significant undertaking involving countless hours of professional development, curricula development, and learning new strategies to engage students at a much deeper level.

With the adoption of the improved standards, Utah is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2018, 66% of jobs in Utah will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 42% of adults in the state currently have such a credential, resulting in a 24% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to helping close this gap.



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## Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Adopting improved standards was only the first step in raising the bar for Utah students. The next phase of this work was to implement aligned tests that are more meaningful to students, teachers, and parents in determining which skills a student has or has not yet mastered. Utah needed a test that measures the critical thinking and problem solving skills that students need to succeed—and previous state tests did not evaluate this level of learning. Utah's 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 and skills outlined in the standards. At the heart of accountability is the need to ensure that all students across Utah 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.

Utah was originally a member of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, a group of states that worked together to develop computer-adaptive tests in English language arts and math. The State Office of Education withdrew from the consortium in 2012 in favor of creating a test unique to Utah and contracted with American Institutes of Research (AIR) to create the Student Assessment of Growth and Excellence (SAGE). This computer-adaptive assessment was developed by Utah teachers, reviewed by a 15-member parent panel and field tested across the state in spring 2014.

The SAGE assessment system includes optional interim assessments that are given by teachers in the beginning and middle of the year to help predict student performance on the annual assessments in the spring. Classroom activities and lesson plans with activities similar to those on the annual tests are also available. The SAGE assessments measure college and career readiness and began replacing the state's Criterion Referenced Test (CRT) in spring 2014. The SAGE English language arts test is given to students in grades 3–11 and the math test to those in grades 3–8. High school students in selected math and science courses will take end-of-course tests.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for the key criteria that will make Utah state tests a strong measuring stick of how our students are doing on the path to college at the state and national level. Leaders are optimistic about the SAGE tests because they include so many of the criteria that make up a high-quality assessment. As advocates, we need to ensure that the state tests accurately measure college and career readiness and have these characteristics to serve as a tool that benefits our 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 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. How will scores impact students?

- There are currently no test score requirements for graduation or promotion.

### 4. Will scores impact teacher evaluations?

- It has been proposed that student assessments are used as one factor in teacher evaluations, but currently there is no legislation that mandates it.

### 5. How will 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 Utah receive a high-quality education.



## The Utah Core State Standards:

- Are more rigorous academic standards that prepare all students for success after high school.
- Emphasize real-world skills like 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.

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

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Utah 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 permitted 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. How were teachers involved in the test development process?

- Hundreds of Utah teachers were involved in the development of the SAGE tests. They participated in the development of test questions and reviewed potential questions for alignment and to ensure they were fair to all students. Teachers also participated in a week-long standards setting process to determine benchmarks for proficiency for every grade level and subject.

## 8. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students need to be computer literate. 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.

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

- [www.schools.utah.gov/assessment/Adaptive-Assessment-System.aspx](http://www.schools.utah.gov/assessment/Adaptive-Assessment-System.aspx)
- [www.schools.utah.gov/assessment/SAGE-Communication.aspx](http://www.schools.utah.gov/assessment/SAGE-Communication.aspx)
- [www.BusinessForCore.org](http://www.BusinessForCore.org)