

# A BIG WIN FOR NEW MEXICO STUDENTS



## New Mexico Common Core State Standards

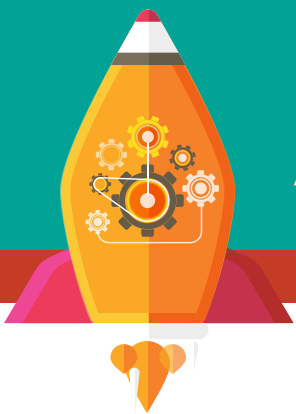
For the last decade, New Mexico has had one of the lowest graduation rates in the nation, reaching only 70% in 2013. That same year, on the Nation's Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP), less than a third of 4th and 8th grade students demonstrated proficiency in reading and math. Fifty-one percent of New Mexico's 2013 graduates who pursued higher education had to take a remedial class because they lacked the skills needed for college-level work. To address these troubling statistics, in 2010, the State Board of Education adopted a set of college- and career-ready standards in English language arts (ELA) and math to ensure students were learning the skills most essential for successful futures.

New Mexico's Proficiency Performance on the Nation's Report Card

Year	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2011	30%	21%	24%	22%
2013	31%	21%	23%	22%

The previous state standards did not adequately provide students with the skills they needed for successful futures. According to a report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, the ELA standards were rigorous and clear at the high school level, but were vague and repetitive from kindergarten through 8th grade, and did not provide students with the skills they needed for high school. The math standards were excessive (containing as many as 60 standards per grade level) and did not prioritize the most important content. On the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, the standards received a C in rigor and New Mexico's schools received an F in postsecondary workforce readiness and academic achievement.

With the adoption of higher standards, New Mexico is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 61% of jobs in New Mexico will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 29% of adults in the state currently have such a credential, resulting in a 32% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to helping close this gap.



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## Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers across New Mexico have been hard at work putting these higher academic goals in place. It has been a significant undertaking involving countless hours of professional development, curricula alignment, and learning strategies to engage students more deeply than ever before.

The next phase of this work is 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. The state needs a test that can measure the critical thinking and problem solving skills that our students need to succeed. Our existing state tests cannot evaluate this level of learning. 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 New Mexico 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 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: Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. These two tests were field tested in spring 2014 in 35 states, including New Mexico, where students participated in 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.

New Mexico has been a governing member of PARCC since 2010. These higher-quality, computer-based assessments contain a range of question formats including multiple choice and more complex extended essays. Students will write detailed explanations of how they solved a problem in math, and in English language arts, students will write essays and describe their ideas and reasoning. In the classroom, assignments, quizzes, and exams will increasingly involve computers and technology. Students in grades 3–11 will take the PARCC tests in ELA and math in spring 2015 instead of the previous Standards Based Assessments (SBA).

During this transition, it is important to ensure that New Mexico’s state tests provide a reliable measure of how students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national level. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the PARCC assessments 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 serve as a useful tool to help students improve.

## 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 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.

## The New Mexico Common Core State Standards

- Make students globally competitive by teaching standards that are used throughout the world.
- Give students the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in college or careers.
- Give all students access to the same rigorous standards, regardless of where they live.
- Clarify standards so that parents, teachers, and students understand what is expected of them.

## 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 so 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.

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

- The PARCC assessments will replace the SBA in English language arts and math in grades 3–11. Students will continue to take the SBA in science.

### 4. Will test scores impact schools and districts?

- School-wide test results will be used as one measure for school accountability. Just as teachers use tests as academic checkups for individual students, they are also checkups for our schools. Districts 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 receive a high-quality education.

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

- In spring 2013, the New Mexico Department of Education offered a blended model of professional development to teachers and administrators. By midyear, more than 2,500 teachers had attended trainings. Last year, district and charter schools selected teams of teachers and administrators leading the Common Core transition locally to participate in the professional development and share the resources back at their school or district.

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

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

- New Mexico teachers reviewed and provided feedback on test items. Additionally, some teachers are playing an important role in providing information about PARCC to their fellow educators and the public through the Educator Leader Cadre, a group of teachers who share best practices and are active leaders in state and local implementation.

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

- Students need to be computer literate, but paper and pencil versions will be available during the first three years of testing for schools that do not yet meet the technology requirement or prefer that method.
- 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 workforce.

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

- [www.parcconline.org](http://www.parcconline.org)
- [www.newmexicocommoncore.org/](http://www.newmexicocommoncore.org/)
- [www.ped.state.nm.us/ped/NMPARCCIndex.html](http://www.ped.state.nm.us/ped/NMPARCCIndex.html)
- [www.BusinessForCore.org](http://www.BusinessForCore.org)