

A BIG WIN FOR NORTH DAKOTA STUDENTS



The North Dakota Common Core State Standards

In 2013, North Dakota's on-time high school graduation rate was 87%—one of the highest in the nation. That same year, more than two-thirds of 4th and 8th grade students demonstrated proficiency in reading and math on the North Dakota State Assessment (NDSA). Unfortunately, there was another story to be told. On the Nation's Report Card, also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), well under half of students in both grades demonstrated proficiency in those subjects—revealing that North Dakota had set its bar too low.

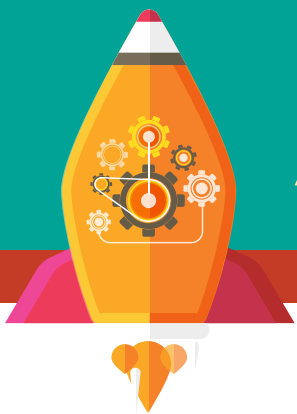
North Dakota's Proficiency Rates on the 2013 NAEP and the NDSA

Test	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
NAEP	48%	34%	41%	34%
NDSA	80%	76%	71%	75%

Although students were graduating high school and reaching proficiency on the NDSA, they were not prepared for college and careers. In 2013, 26% of full-time college freshmen at state universities needed to take a remedial class because they lacked the skills for college-level work. Recognizing this disconnect, the North Dakota Board of Education adopted a set of college- and career-ready standards in English language arts (ELA) and math in 2011 to help ensure students were learning the skills most essential for success in college and the workforce.

North Dakota recognized that previous state standards were unclear and contained vague explanations of student expectations. Additionally, high school math standards were missing some of the most critical material. On the U.S Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, North Dakota's standards received a D because they lacked the rigor necessary to prepare students for college-level work. With the adoption of higher standards, North Dakota is one step closer to ensuring that students have the opportunity to reach their full potential.

Raising the bar now is critical. Sixty-nine percent of jobs in the state will require a postsecondary credential by 2020, yet only 50% of adults in North Dakota currently have such a credential, resulting in a 19% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to helping close this gap.



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Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

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

The next phase of this work is to implement aligned assessments that are more meaningful to students, teachers, and parents in determining which skills a student has or has not yet mastered in order to be prepared for college and careers. North Dakota needs a test that measures the critical-thinking and problem-solving skills that students need to be successful. The existing state tests cannot evaluate this level of learning and clearly do not provide an accurate picture of student achievement. Improved assessments are an opportunity to move beyond rote-memorization “bubble tests” to ones that mirror the higher standards and provide teachers with valuable information on how effectively they are teaching and students are learning.

For the past four years, teams of academics, testing experts, and teachers have been working tirelessly to create two new testing options aligned to college- and career-ready standards: PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. These two assessment systems were field tested this past spring in 35 states, including North Dakota, where students took the Smarter Balanced field test. The tests aim to do the following:

- Accurately measure students’ 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.

North Dakota was originally a member of both consortia, but left PARCC in 2013 to become a governing state in the Smarter Balanced consortium. Students in grades 3–8 and 11 will take the computer adaptive tests this spring in math and ELA. The Smarter Balanced system also comes with a suite of resources, including classroom activities and short formative assessments that allow teachers to measure progress throughout the year to ensure students are on track.

A High-Quality Assessment

- Is developed with input from academic and testing experts, as well as teachers.
- Is field tested and reviewed before being fully implemented.
- 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.

Putting better assessments in place is not enough. They need 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 North Dakota 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.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how North Dakota students are doing on the path to college and careers both at the state and national levels. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the Smarter Balanced assessments because they meet so many of the criteria that make up a high-quality aligned test. As supporters, we need to not only ensure that the assessments accurately measure college and career readiness, but are also a useful tool to benefit students.

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 establishing a classroom where all students can achieve.

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

- Yes. The Smarter Balanced tests will replace the North Dakota State Assessment in both ELA and math.



North Dakota Common Core State Standards

- Are more rigorous academic standards that prepare all students for success after high school.
- Emphasize real-world critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.
- 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 they can get the help they need.

Smarter Balanced

- A group of states working together to develop high-quality, computer-adaptive assessments that measure college and career readiness in both math and language arts.

4. Will annual test scores impact schools and districts?

- As a part of the No Child Left Behind Act, school-wide test results are used as one measure for school accountability. Just as tests are used as academic checkups for individual students, they also serve as checkups on our schools. Districts need to identify struggling students and schools in need of support so that interventions can be put in place to ensure all students across North Dakota receive a high-quality education.

5. How will test scores impact teachers?

- Assessment scores can show classroom performance and help guide teachers' instruction. Scores from the assessments are not tied to a teacher's employment status.

6. How will test scores impact students?

- There are no testing requirements for graduation or promotion.

7. What kind of professional development did teachers receive in preparation for the standards and tests?

- Over the past few years, professional development opportunities have been offered across the state at the district, regional, and state levels. The Succeed 2020 grant and the Regional Education Associations have spent a tremendous amount of time on this—changing course now would be a huge step backwards and a waste of time already invested.

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

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, North Dakota 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.

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

- North Dakota teachers were involved in a review of the test questions for content, bias/sensitivity, and accessibility. They also assisted with the development of learning resources in the Digital Library, an online collection of aligned resources to support teachers as they adjust to the standards.

10. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students need to be computer literate. Paper and pencil versions will be available during the first three years of testing for schools that cannot meet the technology requirement.
- 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.

11. Where can I go for more information?

- www.smarterbalanced.org
- www.sbac.org
- www.dpi.state.nd.us/title1/targeted/require/assess/
- www.BusinessForCore.org