

A BIG WIN FOR TENNESSEE STUDENTS

Tennessee Academic Standards



Tennessee is the fastest-improving state in public education in the United States. Our students made historic gains on the most recent Nation's Report Card, also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Tennessee improved its national standing in every category, as shown in the table below. This improvement is due in no small part to Tennessee's state and local chambers of commerce, business leaders, community organizations, and education advocates across the state joining together to build support for reforms to boost student achievement.

In 2010, Tennessee's State Board of Education adopted a set of academic standards in math and English language arts that were higher, clearer, and more focused on the skills that matter the most. Tennessee's previous standards were vague and lacked a focus on the skills most necessary for college-level work. The standards received an 'F' for postsecondary and workforce readiness in the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report. Although 90% of Tennessee students scored proficient on the state assessments in reading and math, only 26% were proficient on the national tests—a difference of more than 60%.

Now that Tennessee has accomplished the hard work of implementing the updated standards, Tennessee students are demonstrating significant academic achievement gains. Overall, in both reading and math, students' scores in both subjects improved more than 21% on the 2013 NAEP—more growth than any other state.

With the adoption of the updated standards, Tennesseans are one step closer to ensuring that our youth will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 56% of jobs in Tennessee will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 31% of adults in the state currently have this credential, resulting in a 25% skills gap. By raising the bar, we can be confident that our students will be qualified to fill these jobs, contributing to the growth of our economy.

Tennessee's Growth on the Nation's Report Card (Rank Among States)

Year	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2011	47th	41st	45th	42nd
2013	38th	31st	44th	36th



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Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers across Tennessee have been hard at work putting these academic goals in place. It has been a significant undertaking, involving participating in countless hours of professional development, developing updated curricula, and learning teaching strategies to engage students at a higher level. Nearly 60,000 teachers have been trained throughout the state over the past four years.

The next phase of this work in Tennessee is to use state tests 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 to succeed in college or the workforce. We can no longer wait until high school to evaluate whether a student is prepared for the future—or if they are even on track to receive their high school diploma.

Putting better assessments in place is not enough, however. They need to be part of a larger system of accountability that supports student achievement and holds schools accountable for successfully teaching content that reaches the goals of the standards. At the heart of accountability is the need to ensure that all students across Tennessee are receiving 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 effective 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 the resources necessary to continue to help them succeed.

In October 2014, Tennessee chose Measurement, Inc., to develop aligned tests in both math and English language arts. These computer-based tests will be administered in both subjects in the 2015–16 school year, replacing the Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program (TCAP) tests. The new tests aim to accurately measure students' progress toward college

and career readiness, assess a wide range of real-world skills, and provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teachers.

During this time of transition, it is important to continue to advocate for the key criteria that will make Tennessee's updated and aligned tests a strong measuring stick of how our students are doing on the path to college and careers both at the state and national level. Leaders are optimistic that the improved assessments will include many of the criteria that make up a high-quality test. We need to ensure as advocates that the new test not only accurately measures college and career readiness, but also possesses these characteristics so it can be a useful tool that benefits our students.

What does a High-Quality Assessment Look Like?

A high-quality assessment:

- Is fully aligned to the underlying standards;
- Is developed with input from academics, testing experts—and most importantly—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 make sure students are keeping pace;
- Provides detailed and timely feedback that sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are struggling so interventions can be put in place;
- Is comparable across states so that students who move from one state to another will be held to the same standards and have a smoother transition; and
- Can be measured and compared with international tests so we can be assured our students are set up for success in an increasingly globalized economy.

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 creating a classroom where all students can achieve.

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

- Yes. When the updated test is given in the 2015–16 school year, it will replace the old TCAP.

4. How will 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 used as checkups on our schools. We need to identify areas of low performance so that interventions can be put in place to ensure students are on track to graduate college and career ready.



Why Support the TN Academic Standards?

- They are more rigorous academic standards that prepare all students for success after high school.
- They emphasize real-world skills, like critical thinking and problem-solving.
- They are comparable across states.

Why do we need good tests?

- They give us an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- They ensure all students are held to the same expectations.
- They identify struggling students early on so they can get the help they need and graduate prepared for college.

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

- During the summer of 2012, 200 “Core Coaches” were trained to facilitate trainings in their home districts and schools. The coaches trained a total of 45,000 teachers and administrators over 3 days in English language arts, math, and teaching literacy in all content areas. The state continues to offer additional training, ongoing online courses, model units, and lesson-plan sharing.

6. What kind of data will be collected? How will it be used?

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Tennessee is required to collect data on the performance of schools. Data collected will include 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.
- Tennessee also passed a law in 2014 called “The Data Accessibility, Transparency and Accountability Act” ensuring that data collected by the state will be used for the sole purpose of tracking academic progress and the needs of the student.

7. Will the tests take longer?

- Yes. It is estimated the tests will take about an hour and half longer than our previous state test. These tests are of much higher quality, so the time invested will provide us with more detailed and useful information on student progress than ever before. It is time spent reading complex text, writing essays, and explaining their reasoning, which are essential skills to master and to practice.
- Because the updated tests incorporate writing in the English language arts portion, students will no longer need to take a separate writing test.
- On average, students currently spend more time on district benchmark assessments than state tests. Since the new tests assess a wider range of skills and provide better information, they have the potential to eliminate many of the district assessments, reducing the overall time students spend testing.

8. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students will need to be computer literate. Paper and pencil versions will be available during the first three years of the new testing for schools that cannot meet the technology requirement.
- While it may take some time to ensure every school has the hardware necessary and meets the technological 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.tn.gov/education/assessment/
- www.tnscore.org
- www.expectmoretn.org/
- www.BusinessForCore.org