

A BIG WIN FOR WASHINGTON STUDENTS



The Common Core State Standards

In 2014, Washington's on-time high school graduation rate was 77%—nearly one in four students were not graduating on time. On the 2013 Nation's Report Card, also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), less than half of 4th and 8th grade students demonstrated proficiency in reading and math. That same year, student performance from the state Measurements of Student Progress (MSP) test demonstrated that between 50% and 73% of students were proficient, depending on the grade and subject. These results showed that Washington had set the bar too low.

Although most students were graduating high school and achieving proficiency on the state assessments, they were not leaving high school prepared for college and careers. In 2010, 57% of Washington high school graduates who enrolled in community colleges had to take at least one remedial class because they lacked the skills to successfully complete college-level work. Recognizing this disconnect, in 2011, the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction adopted a set of college- and career-ready standards in English language arts (ELA) and math to help ensure students were learning the skills most essential to succeed in college and the workforce.

Washington's previous ELA standards were well-organized, but they contained vague language and were due to be revised. They were also missing up to 35% of what the Thomas B. Fordham Institute identifies as the most essential content. The math standards were rigorous and similarly well-organized, but did not fully develop several important concepts, such as trigonometry and fractions. On the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, Washington's state standards received just a C for rigor and the state received a C in postsecondary workforce readiness.

With the adoption of these higher standards, Washington is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 70% of jobs in the state will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 39% of adults currently have such a credential, resulting in a 31% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to helping close this gap.

Washington's Proficiency Rates on the 2013 NAEP and MSP

Assessment	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
MSP	63%	73%	53%	66%
NAEP	48%	40%	42%	42%



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Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers across Washington have been hard at work preparing for the standards since their adoption. It has been a significant undertaking involving countless hours of professional development, curricula alignment, and learning strategies to engage students at a deeper level 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, careers, and life. 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. Instead, the new tests will mirror the higher standards and provide teachers with valuable information on how effectively they are teaching and students are learning.

Although these new tests are a huge improvement, implementing better assessments alone 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 Washington 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 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 help them 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 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 in spring 2014 in 35 states, including Washington, where 200,000 students participated in the Smarter Balanced 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.

Washington is a governing member of the Smarter Balanced consortium. Students in grades 3–8 and 11 will take these high-quality, computer-based tests in math and ELA in spring 2015. The tests are computer adaptive which means they automatically adjust the difficulty of the questions as students take the test. Computer adaptive assessments provide a more accurate measure of the skills students have mastered and those they need to practice. Students will be required to apply their knowledge to solve real-world problems through critical thinking, writing, and analysis. The Smarter Balanced system also includes a Digital Library, which contains professional resources and instructional materials that teachers can use in the classroom. Teachers will have the option to give interim tests at various points during the year to serve as academic checkups and identify when students may need extra support to ensure they are on track.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how Washington students are doing on the path to college and careers 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 advocates, we need to ensure that the assessments 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, testing experts, and 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 not on track so interventions can be put in place.
- Assists in identifying high-achieving students so they can receive resources that will help them maintain their academic engagement.
- Is comparable across states.

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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



The Common 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 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 English language arts.

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 assessments will replace the Measurements of Student Progress (MSP) in grades 3–8 and 11 in math and ELA in spring 2015.

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 Washington receive a high-quality education.

5. Will test scores impact teachers?

- Student growth—the growth in subject matter knowledge, understanding, and skills over time—is one of multiple measures used in teacher evaluations. It can be measured through state assessment scores, but can also be measured by a variety of other classroom-based, school-based, or district-based assessments as well.

6. How will test scores impact students?

- In Washington, 3rd grade students who score below basic (or receive a score of 1) must be put in an intensive reading program to be promoted to 4th grade. Beginning with the Class of 2019, students will have to pass the 11th grade tests in order to graduate. Washington has proposed using the Smarter Balanced tests for graduation beginning with the Class of 2016. The score required for graduation will be lower than the college and career readiness score and will be

determined by the State Board of Education.

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

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Washington 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.

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

- Washington 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 teaching the standards.

9. 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.
- Although it will 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.

10. Where can I go for more information?

- www.smarterbalanced.org
- www.k12.wa.us/smarter/default.aspx
- www.readywa.org/state-testing-faqs.html
- www.BusinessForCore.org