

# A BIG WIN FOR ALASKA STUDENTS



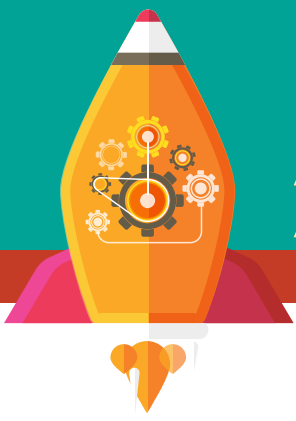
## Alaska English/Language Arts and Mathematics Content Standards

In 2014, Alaska's on-time high school graduation rate was 71%—considerably lower than most states. Recent results on the Nation's Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP) showed that fewer than 40% of the state's 4th and 8th grade students were proficient in reading and math. This low performance demonstrates how Alaskan students are falling behind early in their academic careers and continue to struggle after they graduate high school. In 2012, 46% of Alaska high school graduates entering the University of Alaska had to take a remedial course because they lacked the skills to successfully complete college-level work—evidence of the misalignment between public education standards and higher education expectations. To address this disconnect, in 2012 the State Board of Education and Early Development adopted a set of higher academic standards in English/Language Arts (ELA) and math designed to better prepare students for college and careers.

Year	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2011	37%	26%	35%	31%
2013	37%	27%	33%	31%

Alaska's previous standards did not adequately provide students with the skills necessary for success after high school. In the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, the state received a D in postsecondary and workforce readiness and its standards received a C in rigor. According to a 2010 report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, both the ELA and math standards were "among the worst in the nation." The math standards in particular were poorly organized and missing much of the most essential content, earning them a D grade. The English/Language Arts standards were given an F for being unclear and repetitive.

With the adoption of higher standards, Alaska is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 62% of jobs in the state will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 30% of adults currently have such a credential, resulting in a 32% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to closing this gap and helping ensure that Alaska employers are able to hire Alaska graduates.



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## Better Standards Need Better Assessments

The next phase of this work is to implement an improved assessment that is 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—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 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 Alaska receive a 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.

Alaska chose the Achievement and Assessment Institute at the University of Kansas to develop a state-specific assessment aligned to the higher standards. This assessment, known as the Alaska Measures of Progress (AMP), will be given to students in grades 3–10 in math and English/language arts beginning in spring 2015. These computer-based assessments will go beyond multiple choice questions and require students to think deeply, read critically, and explain their reasoning. The tests will have accessibility features such as highlighters and

math tools. In addition, the improved assessments will include technology-enhanced questions that require students to create visual representations of mathematical concepts—such as graphs, pictures, and linear equations—resulting in a more interactive experience for students.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how Alaska students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the AMP tests 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 have these characteristics to serve as a useful tool to benefit students.

## A High-Quality Assessment:

- Is fully aligned to the standards.
- 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.
- Provides detailed and timely feedback that acts as an academic checkup.
- Sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are not on track so that supportive interventions can be put in place.

## 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. 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 checkups for our schools. We 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 will receive a high-quality education.

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

- Yes. The AMP will replace the Standards Based Assessment (SBA) in grades 3–10.

### 4. How will test scores impact students?

- There are no testing requirements for promotion or graduation.

### 5. How were teachers involved in the assessment development process?

- Alaska teachers from all districts were invited to participate on committees to develop test blueprints, review reading passages, and check for bias and sensitivity in questions.



## The Alaska English/ Language Arts and Mathematics Content Standards:

- Establish a strong foundation of knowledge and skills that all students need to success after graduation.

## Better assessments:

- Give an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- Ensure 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.

## 6. What kind of data is collected? Is it released?

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Alaska 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. Do students need to be computer literate?

- The AMP is computer-based so 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.

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

- [www.education.alaska.gov/akassessments](http://www.education.alaska.gov/akassessments)
- [www.BusinessForCore.org](http://www.BusinessForCore.org)

