

A BIG WIN FOR NEVADA STUDENTS



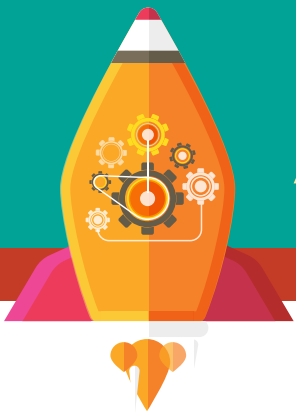
Nevada Academic Content Standards

It is no secret that Nevada students have historically performed behind their peers in other states. In 2014, just 70% of Nevada students graduated high school on time—one of the lowest rates in the nation. On the most recent Nation's Report Card, also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, less than 40% of students in tested grades were proficient in reading and math. It was clear that Nevada schools were not preparing students with the skills necessary for success. In recognition of these longstanding trends, in 2010, the State Board of Education adopted a set of academic standards that were higher, clearer, and more focused on the essential skills and knowledge that students need to be successful in college and careers.

Year	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2011	36%	25%	29%	26%
2013	34%	27%	28%	30%

Nevada's previous standards were missing as much as 50% of content deemed essential by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute. In 2010, more than 50% of first-year students at Nevada community colleges had to enroll in a remedial class because they lacked the needed skills for college-level work. In the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, Nevada received an F in academic achievement and in postsecondary and workforce readiness.

With the adoption of higher standards, Nevada is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 58% of jobs in Nevada will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 28% of adults in the state currently have such a credential, resulting in a 30% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to helping close this gap.



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Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers across Nevada have been hard at work putting these academic goals in place. It has been a significant undertaking involving many 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 assessments 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. Existing state tests cannot evaluate this level of learning. 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.

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 Nevada 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 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.

For the past four years, teams of academics, testing experts, and teachers have been working tirelessly to create two 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 tests were field tested in spring 2014 in 35 states, including Nevada, where students participated in the Smarter Balanced field test.

The new tests aim to do the following:

- Accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness.
- Assess a wide range of skills, including critical thinking and writing skills.
- Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning.

Nevada has been a member of the Smarter Balanced consortium since 2010. The new reading and math tests will be given to students in grades 3–8 in spring 2015, and end-of-course tests will be given to high school students in selected courses. These higher quality assessments will measure college- and career-ready skills and provide real-time information to give teachers and parents a more accurate picture of student strengths and weaknesses.

During this transition, it is important to continue to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how Nevada 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 tests because they include so many of the criteria that make up a high-quality assessment system. As advocates, we need to ensure that the state tests accurately measure college and career readiness and have these characteristics to 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 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.

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.

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

- Yes. Beginning in spring 2015, the Smarter Balanced tests will replace the previous state tests in grades 3–8 and the High School Proficiency Exams in Algebra, Geometry, and English II.



The Nevada Academic Content Standards:

- Are more rigorous academic standards that prepare all students for success after high school.
- Emphasize real-world skills, such as critical thinking and problem solving.
- Are comparable across states.

Better Assessments:

- Give us an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- Ensure all students are held to the same expectations.
- Identify struggling students so that they can get the help they need.
- Identify high-achieving students to provide them with the resources necessary to continue to excel.

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.

4. Will test scores impact schools and districts?

- School-wide test results are only one of the measures used for school accountability. Just as tests are used as academic checkups for individual students, they are also used as checkups for schools. Districts need to identify areas of low performance so that interventions can be put in place to ensure that students are on track to graduate college and career ready.

5. How will test scores impact teachers?

- Student performance constitutes 50% of a teacher's evaluation. This includes student growth on state assessments, but can include other measures as well. Proposed legislation would reduce the percentage to 40%.

6. How will test scores impact students?

- Starting in the 2014–15 school year, students are no longer required to take the Nevada High School Proficiency Exam to graduate. As a result of a 2013 legislative change, students are now required to take a college readiness exam and end-of-course exams to graduate. For 2015, the State Board of Education selected the ACT as the college readiness exam.

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

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Nevada is required to collect data on the performance of schools. Aggregate 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.

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

- Nevada 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. The Smarter Balanced tests are computer-adaptive, adjusting to a student's demonstrated level of understanding by basing the difficulty of upcoming questions on previous answers, which allows for a more precise measure of student achievement. Paper-based test versions will be available for the first three years for any school that has difficulty meeting the technology requirements.
- Our students need to be using computers regularly so that they gain the computer skills needed for college and the workplace. Computer-based tests are an opportunity to ensure that all of our schools have the technology they need not only for testing, but also for the use of learning tools.

10. Where can I go for more information?

- www.smarterbalanced.org
- www.nevadaready.gov
- www.lvchamber.com/commoncore
- www.BusinessForCore.org