

A BIG WIN FOR WISCONSIN STUDENTS



The Wisconsin Common Core Standards

In 2010, Wisconsin adopted a set of college- and career-ready standards in English language arts (ELA) and math that were higher, clearer, and more focused on learning and applying the essential skills and knowledge students need for college and careers. They were designed to help meet the goals of the “Every Child a Graduate” plan to increase college readiness and graduation rates across the state. Despite consistently having one of the highest on-time graduation rates in the nation at 88%, there is another story to be told. On the most recent Nation’s Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress), less than half of Wisconsin students in the 4th and 8th grades demonstrated proficiency in math and reading. In 2007, 21.3% of new students in the state university system had to enroll in a remedial math class and 6.7% in a remedial English class because they lacked the skills needed for college-level work. Students were graduating from high school, but were not prepared with the skills that mattered most for success.

Wisconsin’s Proficiency Performance on the Nation’s Report Card

Year	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2011	47%	34%	41%	35%
2013	47%	35%	40%	36%

According to a 2010 report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, the previous state standards were vague, confusing, and described as some of the worst in the nation. On the U.S. Chamber of Commerce 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, they received a D in rigor. With the adoption of higher standards, Wisconsin is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 64% of jobs in Wisconsin will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 40% of adults in this state currently have such a credential, resulting in a 24% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to closing this gap.



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Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers across Wisconsin have been hard at work putting these higher academic goals in place. It has been a significant undertaking involving many hours of professional development and curricula alignment to engage students more deeply than before. Wisconsin teachers have developed sample curricula and lessons and shared them with their peers.

The next phase of this work is to implement an improved test 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 Wisconsin 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 the higher 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 Wisconsin, where students took 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 real-world skills, including critical thinking and writing skills.
- Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning.

Wisconsin became a member of the Smarter Balanced consortium in 2010 to design tests aligned to the improved standards. Known as the Badger Exams, these computer-adaptive tests will be given to students in grades 3–8 in math and ELA beginning in spring 2015. The tests adjust the difficulty of questions based on previous student responses to give a more accurate measure of which skills a student has mastered. There are multiple item types, with questions that require students to think critically and respond in open-ended and essay formats. The Smarter Balanced system also has a Digital Library, an online collection of aligned resources that support teachers in using in-class formative assessments to ensure that students are keeping pace throughout the year. High school students will take the aligned ACT Aspire assessments, which measure how well students are progressing toward college readiness.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how Wisconsin students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the Badger Exams 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 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 to ensure that students are keeping pace.
- 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 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.



The Wisconsin Common Core 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 that 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.

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

- The Badger exams will replace the Wisconsin Knowledge and Concepts Exam (WKCE) in grades 3–8 in ELA and math. In high school, the state test will be replaced with the ACT Aspire in grades 9 and 10, and the ACT in grade 11.

4. How will test scores impact schools and districts?

- School-wide test results are only one of the measures used for school accountability. Just as we use tests as academic checkups for individual students, they are also checkups for our schools. Districts need to identify low-performing schools so that interventions can be put in place to ensure that all students across the state receive a high-quality education.

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

- Since 2011, teachers across the state have received training on the foundations of the standards. More intense content area training began in 2012.

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

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

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

- Wisconsin 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 adjusted to teaching the standards.

8. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students need to be computer literate. Paper and pencil versions of the assessments 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.

9. Where can I go for more information?

- www.oea.dpi.wi.gov/assessment
- www.smarterbalanced.org
- www.BusinessForCore.org