

# PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW Assessments in Wisconsin

In 2010, Wisconsin adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). CCSS provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn in English language arts and mathematics as they progress through grades K-12.

In the 2014-15 school year, Wisconsin will begin rolling out new online assessments aligned to the CCSS. The new assessments will be used to gauge how well students are mastering the standards – and ultimately, how ready they are for college and further career education and training. In spring 2014, approximately 60,000 Wisconsin students will participate in the nationwide field test to try out these online assessments and ensure that the process will run well when the tests are fully administered in spring 2015.

## WHAT ARE THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS?

The Common Core State Standards are designed to enhance and improve student learning. The CCSS have greater clarity and rigor than most previous academic standards. They are relevant to the real world, establishing the knowledge and skills young people will need for college and career success. The standards are also robust, ensuring a future U.S. workforce that can compete in the global economy.

The new standards emphasize fewer topics and stress not only procedural skills, but also conceptual and critical thinking. The CCSS build knowledge from grade to grade, enabling students to master important concepts before moving on to others.

The standards are not a curriculum. Decisions about curriculum, tools, materials, and textbooks are left to local districts and schools that know their students best.

The CCSS were developed through a state-led initiative spearheaded by governors and state superintendents in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, college faculty, parents, and education experts. The development of the standards included multiple

public comment periods. They build on the excellent foundation laid across all states to date, and have been internationally benchmarked to ensure rigor on par with top-performing nations.

To date, more than 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the CCSS.

In 2010, Wisconsin districts began implementing CCSS changes in each school and classroom. To prepare educators, Wisconsin's CCSS Team has established various means of collecting and creating resources, including content training websites, virtual professional learning modules with webinars and scripts for use by coaches and other education leaders, Twitter feeds, and content networks that meet face-to-face and virtually.

## THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

- Overview of new assessments, which measure student proficiency against more rigorous standards
- Sample test items
- Overview of accountability for students, teachers, and schools
- Additional resources for parents

# CCSS-Aligned Assessments

## WHY NEW ASSESSMENTS?

Teachers and principals talk a lot about assessments, which are used to measure students' academic achievement. This document highlights the end-of-year summative assessments, which judge program and school effectiveness and student progress toward mastering state standards. For other assessments used with students, see box at right.

New summative assessments will address longstanding concerns that parents, educators, and employers have had about current state assessments – namely, that they measure the ability to memorize facts, rather than the skills to think critically and apply knowledge.

Summative assessment results will contribute to school and district accountability, reported each year in the School and District Report Cards.

## Types of assessments

**Classroom-based:** Informal tests given by teachers as needed throughout the year to assess knowledge and skills in specific areas

**Interim:** The same test repeated at set intervals to measure student growth over time

**Summative:** End-of-year assessments administered by the state to measure student performance against a common set of standards

*This document addresses summative assessments.*

## WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT THE NEW SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS?

The new assessments for English language arts and mathematics will enable educators to deepen their understanding of student progress from grade to grade -- and just as importantly, identify and address any gaps in progress **well before students enter college or the workforce.**

## New English language arts assessments:

- Ask students to read more complex fiction and non-fiction texts and use evidence from these texts to answer questions, make inferences, and present persuasive arguments.
- Emphasize literacy across all subjects, not just English.
- Test writing at every grade level.

## New math assessments:

- Go beyond multiple-choice questions and present students with multi-step problems, conceptual questions, and real-world applications.
- Ask students to not only get answers correct, but also explain how they arrived at those answers.
- Cover fewer topics in greater depth, focusing on the most critical areas.

## Benefits of new assessments

- Scores provide students, parents, and teachers with insight into college and career readiness early enough to address issues and provide extra support where needed.
- Wisconsin will transition to online computer adaptive assessments, which replace pencil-and-paper tests and can adjust the difficulty of questions based on student responses. A student who answers an item correctly will receive a more challenging item, while an incorrect answer generates an easier question. This method provides students with a more engaging test experience, is more time-efficient, and—especially for low- or high-achieving students—produces more accurate results than traditional methods.

## Who is developing the new assessments?

Because the CCSS were a state-led initiative, most states across the country chose to join one of two consortia of states working together to develop new assessments based on the Common Core State Standards. These are the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

Wisconsin is a member of the Smarter Balanced. All customization and final decisions about assessments remain at the state level, in partnership with local educators. Read more about SBAC at [www.SmarterBalanced.org](http://www.SmarterBalanced.org)



**NOTE: While taking advantage of technology, new assessments are designed to work with the computing resources in schools today. The assessments work fine on very old operating systems and require minimal processors and memory. However, states that have not yet made the transition to online testing will be offered a pencil-and-paper option for the first three years.**

- New assessments will allow Wisconsin to compare student performance not only across schools and districts statewide, but also to that of students in other states that have adopted the Common Core.
- The new assessments are designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners—who may use accommodations—allowing these students to perform to their potential. For students with disabilities, the online assessments will address visual, auditory, and physical access barriers. These students will be able to take a test individualized to meet their needs at the same time as other students in their class. Tools have also been developed to help English language learners demonstrate their knowledge, regardless of their level of proficiency in English. The goal of the accommodations is to make the assessments more accessible and to produce results that are valid for these students, not to give them an advantage over other students.

## College Readiness Defined:

Being college ready means being able to succeed in introductory courses at post-secondary institutions – those that are credit-bearing and transferable. In English language arts/literacy this means demonstrating reading, writing, listening, and research skills, as well as knowledge of specific subject areas needed for entry-level English and composition courses. In math, this means demonstrating foundational knowledge and quantitative reasoning skills, along with specific subject area knowledge (like algebra) needed for entry-level math and statistics courses.

# Sample questions by grade level

The following questions are representative of those found on the new assessments. For more examples, please visit [www.smarterbalanced.org/pilot-test](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/pilot-test).

## EXAMPLE OF A 5TH GRADE MATH QUESTION

### SAMPLE ITEM

Five swimmers compete in a 50-meter race. The finish time for each swimmer is shown in the video.

	23.42		23.35
	23.18		23.24
	23.21		

Explain how the results of the race would change if the race used a clock that rounded to the nearest tenth.

**Explanation:**

## EXAMPLE OF A 6TH GRADE ENGLISH QUESTION

### SAMPLE ITEM

Students are asked to read the essay “Planes on the Brain” by Elisabeth Deffner, from Faces Magazine, and answer the following questions:

1. How does the author emphasize the point that the TAM program was a positive influence on the sisters’ lives? Use details from the text to support your answer.
2. Highlight the parts of the text that provide evidence to support the idea that the Tuskegee Airmen were historically important.
3. What does the author mean by “the sky is no longer the limit”? Use details from the text to support your response.

**Answer:**

## EXAMPLE OF AN 11TH GRADE ENGLISH QUESTION

### SAMPLE ITEM

The following excerpt is from a writer’s first draft of a narrative essay. Read the excerpt. Then rewrite it, revising it to correct errors.

I had no idea what to expect when I walked into the arena. There were people everywhere, most of them clad in brightly colored jersey’s with different players’ names on the back of them. There were some names I couldnt even pronounce. Me and my friend made our way to the corridor that led to the ice rink. The minute I stepped through the doorway, I could feel a rush of cold air hit my face. I could actually smell the ice! I never thought ice had a smell, but it really does. The next thing I noticed was the size, of the ice rink. There were lines and circles painted all over it, and I knew immediately I wouldn’t understand the rules. We found our seats, and it wasn’t long before the game started. We sat so close to the action that I felt as if I was right in the middle of it, the action was so intense it was hard to follow the puck, keep an eye on the players, and to figure out which team was ahead. When the home team scored a goal. The entire arena erupted with cheering that was so loud, I bet it was heard across town. by the end of the game, I felt so many emotions: delight, disappointment, fear, and excitement. Mostly, though, I felt in awe of the athletes who played this game. They are much more tougher than I ever expected. I suspect others new to hockey will be as impressed as me by this fast, interesting game.

Now rewrite the excerpt, revising it to correct errors.

**Answer:**

## What Parents Can Expect

This is a new system with a new way of scoring. Therefore, it is not possible to directly compare new scores with old ones.

The new assessments measure deeper knowledge and skills deemed particularly important to students' futures, including problem-solving, writing, and critical thinking. The scores provide students, parents, and teachers with the ability to address issues well before students are ready to graduate.

Because the new assessments are more rigorous, student achievement scores may initially be lower. A dip should not necessarily be interpreted as a decline in student learning or educator performance. Educators expect the short-term decline to reverse as teachers and students become more familiar with the standards and better equipped to meet the academic challenges they present.

### How will schools support students during the transition?

The Wisconsin CCSS Team and the Wisconsin Response to Intervention (RtI) Center have jointly developed research-based instructional strategies for teachers that can be used in the classroom to support students during the transition. To learn more about these instructional strategies, please visit <http://www.wirticenter.com/strategiesban>.

### If Students Need Additional Help?

If children experience a dip in progress on state test results, don't hesitate to discuss this with their teachers and to work with the school to develop a plan for enrichment or improvement.

### How will schools be held accountable?

Assessment results will be used in four different measures of school success that contribute to School and District Report Card scores. Report card scores are based on performance in the following four priority areas:

- Student Achievement proficiency in reading and mathematics on state assessments
- Student Growth measured by year-to-year improvements in achievement
- Closing Gaps in performance between specific student groups (comparing English language learners, low-income students, students with disabilities, and members of a racial or ethnic group with their peers)
- On-Track and Postsecondary Readiness is a measurement using predictors of high school graduation and potential post high school success

Schools and districts are also evaluated on their test participation, chronic absenteeism, and dropout rates. These are measures of student engagement. Based on those scores, schools and districts will be placed into one of five categories, ranging from *Fails to Meet Expectations* to *Significantly Exceeds Expectations*.

School and District Report Cards are issued annually. To view report cards and for more details about accountability in Wisconsin, please visit <http://reportcards.dpi.wi.gov>.

### How will teachers and principals be held accountable?

An educator effectiveness system for Wisconsin teachers and principals was signed into law April 2, 2012. This system is designed to evaluate teachers and principals through a fair, valid, and reliable process that incorporates student growth scores into each educator's evaluation. A wealth of information can be accessed on the Educator Effectiveness System page at <http://ee.dpi.wi.gov>.

# Preparing and supporting your child

- Discuss the new tests with your child. Make sure he or she is not scared or anxious going into the new tests.
- With an older child, explain that the new assessments were created to help him or her better prepare for college and career.
- Explain to your child that the tests will initially be more challenging. Tell your child you have high expectations and that you are there to help every step of the way.
- Review test results with your child. Bring the teacher into the discussion as needed.
- Provide a quiet, comfortable place for studying at home and make sure your child gets a good night's sleep and a nutritious breakfast before a test.

## Staying informed and involved

- Become familiar with the Common Core State Standards.
- Explore practice tests through the interactive online platform at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/pilot-test>.
- Read all comments written by teachers on assignments, tests, and report cards. Ask teachers to explain anything that is unclear and discuss how you can best work together to address comments.
- Monitor your child's progress. If your child needs extra help or wants to learn more about a subject, work with his or her teacher to identify opportunities for tutoring, after-school clubs or other resources.
- Do not judge your child based on a single test score. Tests are not perfect measures of what a child can do. There are many other factors that might influence a test score. For example, a child can be affected by the way he or she is feeling on test day or the particular classroom setting.
- Meet with your child's teacher as often as possible to discuss his or her progress. Ask for activities to do at home to help prepare for tests and improve your child's proficiency.

## Additional Resources

- For a more detailed look at what the CCSS mean at each grade level, please visit [www.pta.org/parentsguide](http://www.pta.org/parentsguide).
- For more information on the Smarter Balanced consortium, of which Wisconsin is a governing state, please visit [www.smarterbalanced.org](http://www.smarterbalanced.org).
- For more on the Common Core rollout in Wisconsin, please visit <http://commoncore.dpi.wi.gov>.