

# A BIG WIN FOR ARIZONA STUDENTS

## Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards



For Arizona students to succeed, business leaders and community members must remain active stakeholders in education. Partnering with the education community will improve our students' performance and opportunities for post-graduation success. Arizona's students have consistently performed below their peers in other states. In 2013, 75% of Arizona students graduated from high school on time, compared to 81% nationally. In addition, our students made little, if any, progress on the most recent Nation's Report Card, also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP).

Arizona's previous standards lacked an emphasis on the skills most necessary for college-level work. In the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, Arizona's standards received an 'F' in postsecondary and workforce readiness. And even though three-quarters of students do complete their high school degree on-time, many do not have the skills they need to succeed. As a result, almost 60% of Arizona's community college freshmen enroll in a remedial course because they lack the skills for college-level work.

In 2010, the Arizona State Board of Education adopted a set of academic standards in math and English language arts that were higher, clearer, and more focused on the skills that matter most to ensure that every student in Arizona would be prepared for college-level work and careers upon graduation. Teachers began implementing Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards in 2011 and continue to support the standards as they see positive results in their classrooms. Last summer, 71% of teachers surveyed felt the standards could improve learning in their own classrooms, and 78% thought they could improve learning across all classrooms.

There is evidence that the standards are making a positive impact. The first district to fully implement the standards, Osborn School District, is now the only district in the Phoenix area with every school earning an A or B on the state report card. Some schools have improved by as much as two letter grades in a single year.

With the adoption of the new standards, Arizona's education system is one step closer to ensuring that our youth will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 64% of jobs in Arizona will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 31% of adults in the state currently have this credential, resulting in a 33% skills gap. We must continue raising the bar so we can be confident that our students will be qualified to fill these jobs and contribute to the growth of our economy.

Arizona's Performance on the Nation's Report Card (Rank Among States)

Year	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2011	43rd	45th	38th	37th
2013	32nd	44th	44th	40th



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## The AzMERIT test will:

- Accurately measure students' progress toward college and career readiness;
- Assess a wide range of skills, including real-world skills like critical thinking and writing;
- Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning; and
- Give parents the peace of mind they need to know if their child is performing on grade level.

## What Does a High-Quality Assessment Look Like?

- Provides teachers the timely information they need to improve student learning;
- Allows students to move beyond rote memorization to show their critical thinking and problem-solving skills;
- Provides students with accurate information on their preparedness for life, college, and career; and
- Enables student performance to be compared across states.

## Arizona's New Assessment

Arizona needs a test that is more meaningful to students, teachers, and parents in determining which skills a student has mastered in order to be successful in college and careers. Although our students have been able to reach proficiency as measured on the state test, the bar for proficiency was set too low. In the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, Arizona earned a 'D' in truth in advertising for student proficiency. As recently as 2011, 54% of Arizona's eighth graders scored proficient on the state math test, but only 29% could reach proficiency on a more rigorous international test. Arizona needs an assessment that provides honest, accurate information about whether a student is on track to graduate with the skills necessary for success. When Arizona's contract on the Arizona Instruments to Measure Standards (AIMS) test ended, the state had the opportunity to adopt an updated assessment that better fits the needs of our students, parents, and the education community.

This fall, the Arizona State Board of Education adopted Arizona's Measurement of Educational Readiness to Inform Teaching (AzMERIT) as the new statewide test. The assessment will be given to Arizona students in third grade through high school this spring and will replace the AIMS test in reading, writing, and math. The test will be administered by the American Institutes for Research (AIR), a private, nonprofit test vendor, and will be overseen and controlled by the Arizona Department of Education, ensuring that the test is unique to Arizona. Arizona educators and education experts will be engaged in developing questions for the new assessment.

The AzMERIT will provide more useful and relevant information about our students than ever before. As a result, parents and teachers will have better data to determine if a child is on track academically and students will know if they are prepared for life, college, and careers. If a student is falling behind, the data will allow parents and teachers to work together to provide additional support to the student. The less sophisticated AIMS tests were not able to provide this level of detail on what students were learning in the classroom. Now, teachers will have greater ability to emphasize critical thinking and problem-solving skills in addition to the content.

Leaders are enthusiastic about the AzMERIT assessments because they include so many of the characteristics of a high-quality test and mean higher quality instruction for all students. Students will have a chance to show their critical thinking skills by applying concepts learned and showing deeper understanding of a topic on the assessment.

Administering a high-quality assessment needs to be part of a larger system of accountability that supports student achievement and holds our schools accountable for successfully teaching the skills outlined in the standards. At the heart of accountability is the need to ensure that all students across Arizona are receiving the same high-quality education. Meaningful tests are 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 the resources necessary to continue to help them succeed.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is the difference between curriculum, standards, and assessments?

- 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.
- Assessments measure student learning. They provide parents and teachers with information to ensure students are on track for life, college, and career.

### 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 creating a classroom where all students can achieve.

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

- Yes. The AzMERIT will replace the old AIMS test in third grade through high school in reading, writing, and math. The AIMS science test will still be given to students in grades 4, 8, and in high school.

### 4. What can we expect from the first round of test scores?

- When we get our first round of test scores, we should anticipate that they will look different. Scores may be lower than before as a new baseline is established. The new tests set a higher benchmark for student success and both students and teachers will need time to adjust to them. With time and support, we know Arizona students will do well.

### 5. Will the new tests impact graduation?

- Passing the end-of-course tests will not be a high school graduation requirement.



## Why Support Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards?

- They are more challenging and will give our students the knowledge and skills they need to be successful in life after high school.
- They develop students' critical thinking, problem-solving, and writing skills.
- They prepare our students to compete with their peers from across the country and around the world.

## Why Do We Need Good Tests?

- They give us an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- They ensure all students are held to the same expectations.
- They identify struggling students so they can get the help they need.

## 6. How will the scores be used?

- There are still a number of details that need to be determined by the State Board of Education about how the assessment scores will be used for students, teachers, and schools. As these details are discussed, parents, teachers, and community members have opportunities to be engaged in the conversation and to have their voices heard.
- The Arizona State Board of Education is discussing the establishment of a “safe harbor” year for accountability measures that would effectively allow a “hold harmless” period while baseline data is collected on the new assessment and related policy changes are discussed.

## 7. What kind of professional development did teachers receive in preparation for the standards and the new test?

- Districts across the state used a “train the trainer” model and online training through webinars to provide teachers with the necessary professional development on the standards. In addition, many school districts and charter schools are participating in ongoing professional development in partnership with the Arizona Department of Education.
- It has been a significant undertaking involving teachers spending countless hours developing new curricula and learning instructional strategies to engage students in a new way.

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

- Student test data is protected by a number of state and federal laws, including A.R.S. §§ 15-1041 through 15-1045, Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), and Federal Information Security Management Act (FISMA). *Personal student data has never been, and never will be, shared with the federal government.*

## 9. How will teachers be involved in the test development process?

- The AzMERIT test will be unique to Arizona. Both Arizona educators and education experts will be engaged in developing questions for the new assessment.

## 10. Will the tests take longer?

- AzMERIT testing times are similar to those required for the previous statewide assessment. School districts and charter schools can choose to give additional formative tests throughout the year to measure how well students are learning, but this is a fully local decision.

## 11. Do students need to be computer literate?

- School districts and charter schools can choose to administer the assessment via pencil and paper or on a computer. Our students should be using computers regularly so that they gain the computer skills they need for college and the workplace. Computer-based tests are an opportunity to ensure all of our schools are current on technology.

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

- [www.azed.gov](http://www.azed.gov)
- [www.ArizonaAimsHigher.org](http://www.ArizonaAimsHigher.org)
- [www.BusinessForCore.org](http://www.BusinessForCore.org)