

# A BIG WIN FOR NEBRASKA STUDENTS



## The Nebraska Academic Standards

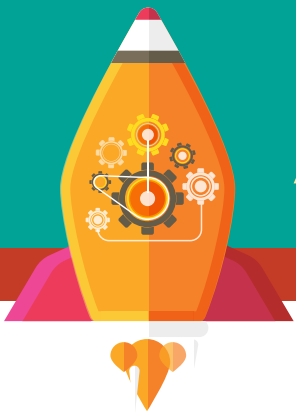
In 2014, Nebraska's on-time high school graduation rate was 90%—one of the highest rates in the nation. On the 2013 Nation's Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP), well under half of 4th and 8th grade students demonstrated proficiency in reading and math. In 2013, 84% of students in the graduating class took the ACT, but only 28% met the college-readiness benchmark in all four subjects (English, reading, math, and science). Most students were graduating high school on-time but were not prepared with the skills they needed for success in college or careers.

Nebraska's Proficiency Performance on the Nation's Report Card

Year	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2011	39%	36%	33%	35%
2013	45%	37%	36%	37%

In an effort to correct this disconnect, the ELA standards were revised in 2014 and made more rigorous and reflective of the skills students need to be college and career ready. State statute requires the Nebraska Department of Education to update standards in all subjects every five years. Before the most recent revisions of the ELA standards in 2014 and the math standards in 2010, the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report graded Nebraska's state standards a D for lack of rigor and a C in postsecondary and workforce readiness. When the state revises the math standards in October 2015, it is imperative that they match the level of rigor of the revised ELA standards and focus on the skills students need for success after high school.

By adopting college- and career-ready standards, Nebraska will be one step closer to ensuring that students 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 helping close this gap.



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## Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

The next phase of closing the skills gap in Nebraska is to implement an improved assessment aligned to college- and career-ready standards 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. Improved assessments aligned to college- and career-ready standards 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 state's standards. At the heart of accountability is the need to ensure that all students across Nebraska 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.

The Nebraska State Accountability Test (NeSA) is given to students in grades 3–8 and 11 every spring in reading and math. A writing test is also given to students in grades 4, 8, and 11 in the winter. These online tests measure how well students are mastering the standards in each grade.

As the state prepares to revise its math standards to match the rigor of the ELA standards, it is equally

important that the state assessments are a strong measuring stick of how Nebraska students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. 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 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 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. How will test scores impact students?

- There are currently no testing requirements for grade promotion or graduation.

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

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

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

- Students need to be computer literate. Most of the NeSA assessments are administered online. The fourth grade writing test is administered with paper and pencil.

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

- [www.BusinessForCore.org](http://www.BusinessForCore.org)
- [www.education.ne.gov/Assessment/Index.html](http://www.education.ne.gov/Assessment/Index.html)



## Better Assessments:

- Give 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.

