

A BIG WIN FOR WEST VIRGINIA STUDENTS



The Next Generation Content Standards and Objectives

In 2014, West Virginia's on-time high school graduation rate was 84%—better than many other states. Unfortunately, there was another story to be told. On the 2013 Nation's Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP), which tests a sample of students, only about a quarter of 4th and 8th graders demonstrated proficiency in math or reading (with the exception of 4th grade math). In 2012, 31% of freshmen enrolled in West Virginia colleges and universities had to take a remedial class because they lacked the skills to successfully complete college-level work. Students were graduating high school, but were not prepared with the skills they needed for success. Recognizing this disconnect, the West Virginia Board of Education adopted the Next Generation Content Standards and Objectives in 2011 in English language arts (ELA) and math to help ensure that students were learning the skills most essential for college and the workforce.

West Virginia's Proficiency Rates on the Nation's Report Card

| Year | 4th Math | 4th Reading | 8th Math | 8th Reading |
|------|----------|-------------|----------|-------------|
| 2011 | 31% | 27% | 21% | 24% |
| 2013 | 35% | 27% | 24% | 25% |

According to a 2010 report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, West Virginia's previous academic standards were among the worst in the nation. The math standards failed to prioritize the most essential skills, and the ELA standards did not cover foundational skills with adequate depth. On the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, West Virginia received an F in academic achievement and a D in postsecondary and workforce readiness.

With the adoption of higher standards, West Virginia is one step closer to ensuring students have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 53% of jobs in the state will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 28% of adults in West Virginia currently have such a credential, resulting in a 25% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to helping close this gap.



A BIG WIN FOR WEST VIRGINIA STUDENTS

Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers across West Virginia have been hard at work putting these higher academic goals in place since their adoption. It has been a significant undertaking involving countless 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 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 traditional 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 West Virginia 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.

For the past four years, teams of academics, testing experts, and teachers have been working tirelessly to create two new testing options aligned to 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. West Virginia students participated in the field test for the Smarter Balanced assessment.

The Smarter Balanced assessments 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.

West Virginia has been a governing member of the Smarter Balanced consortium since 2010. Students in grades 3–11 will take the Smarter Balanced math and English language arts tests in spring 2015. These tests will become part of the West Virginia General Summative Assessment, which will replace the West Virginia Education Standards Test 2 (WESTEST 2). In addition to the summative assessment component, the Smarter Balanced system also includes interim and formative assessments that teachers can give throughout the school year to serve as academic checkups and inform instruction.

West Virginia teachers also have access to the Smarter Balanced Digital Library, an online platform containing more than 2,500 subject- and grade-specific instructional resources designed to help deepen understanding of the formative assessment process. The Digital Library includes instructional segments to model best practices, professional learning resources, as well as interactive multimedia modules built by experts. West Virginia teachers who serve on the State Network of Educators participated in the development and review of many of these resources.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how West Virginia 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 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, including 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 aligned to the standards 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 Next Generation 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 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-based 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 Smarter Balanced assessments will become part of the West Virginia General Summative Assessment, which will replace the WESTEST 2 in grades 3–11 in English language arts and math.

4. Will annual test scores impact schools and districts?

- School-wide test results will be used as one measure for school accountability. Just as tests are used as academic checkups for individual students, they also serve as checkups for our schools. Districts need to identify struggling students and schools in need of support so that interventions can be put in place to ensure that all students across West Virginia receive a high-quality education.

5. How will test scores impact teachers?

- Test scores are part of the educator evaluation system.

6. How will test scores impact students?

- Test scores are not used for graduation or promotion.

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

- Ongoing professional development for the implementation of the standards is provided through the state's eight Regional Education Service Agencies. The West Virginia Department of Education's Office of Assessment and Research is also providing ongoing training to district and school personnel to administer the summative and interim assessments and utilize the formative assessment resources in the Digital Library.

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

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, West Virginia 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); state-level protections include the Student Data Accessibility, Transparency and Accountability Act (found in W.Va. Code 18-2-5h) and provisions in West Virginia Board of Education policy (found in 4350, WVDE Data Access and Management Guidance). The only information that will be publicly available will contain aggregate data for schools, districts, and subgroups.

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

- West Virginia teachers were involved in numerous stages of the development process, including: writing test questions; content, bias, and sensitivity reviews; range-finding for constructed and extended response items; and achievement level setting. They also assisted with the development of interim assessment questions and instructional and professional learning resources in the Digital Library.

10. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students need to be computer literate as both the summative and interim assessments are delivered online.
- 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.

11. Where can I go for more information?

- www.smarterbalanced.org
- www.wvnextgen.org
- wvde.state.wv.us/smarter-balanced/parents/what-you-should-know.html
- www.BusinessForCore.org