

A BIG WIN FOR WYOMING STUDENTS



Wyoming Content and Performance Standards

In 2013, less than half of Wyoming students in the 4th and 8th grades demonstrated proficiency in reading and math on the Nation's Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP). That same year, Wyoming's on-time high school graduation rate was 78%. However, in 2012, the majority of Wyoming's first-time community college students had to take a remedial course, indicating that students were graduating high school lacking the skills necessary to complete college-level work. To address this disconnect, the State Board of Education adopted a set of college- and career-ready standards in 2012 in English language arts (ELA) and math to help ensure that students were learning the skills most essential for success in college and careers.

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

Year	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2011	44%	34%	37%	38%
2013	48%	37%	38%	38%

Wyoming's previous academic standards did not adequately prepare students for success after high school. According to a 2010 report by the Thomas B. Fordham Institute, the ELA standards were missing as much as 65% of the most critical content and were among the worst standards in the country, while the math standards were minimal and did not include the most essential topics. On the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, Wyoming's standards received an F in rigor and the state received a D in postsecondary and workforce readiness.

With the adoption of higher standards, Wyoming is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 65% of jobs in the state will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 34% of adults in the state currently have such a credential, resulting in a 31% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to helping close this gap.



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Better Standards Need Better Assessments

Teachers across Wyoming 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 existing state tests cannot fully 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 Wyoming receive a high-quality education. Meaningful tests serve as school-wide academic checkups that can identify 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 Wyoming, where more than 3,000 students participated in the Smarter Balanced field tests.

The tests 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.

Wyoming is an affiliate member of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Because the Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) has a contract with Educational Testing Services (ETS) to continue developing annual assessments through 2016, WDE will not be using the Smarter Balanced aligned assessments this spring. Rather, students will continue to take the Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students (PAWS), a system that was redesigned in 2014 to align to the updated ELA and math standards and measure college and career readiness. PAWS also provides detailed score reports to parents, teachers, and students that can be used to guide instruction. Students in grades 9–11 will continue to take tests in the ACT suite to measure college readiness in four subject areas: math, reading, language arts, and science.

The Wyoming state legislature recently passed Enrolled Act 87, mandating that the State Board of Education and State Department of Education create an assessment task force. This task force, to be comprised of various stakeholders, will be charged with providing recommendations on future assessments to the state legislature by October 15th, 2015. State statute currently prohibits any format other than multiple choice questions on the state assessment. Since the winter 2016 legislative session will occur too late to make changes to statewide

assessments in the 2015–16 school year, it is unlikely that any new assessment, including the Smarter Balanced assessments, will be administered in the spring of 2016.

As the assessment task force takes shape, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how Wyoming students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. As supporters, 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 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 define what Wyoming students should know and be able to do at each grade level. They aim to provide all Wyoming students an equal, quality education.
- Curriculum is a plan for instruction and guides the selection of materials and textbooks, and the process for evaluation to see if the standards are met. It is set by districts, schools, and teachers to help students achieve.



The Wyoming Content and Performance 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 an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- Ensure that 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-adaptive assessments that measure college and career readiness in both math and English language arts.

2. If students are learning with different curricula, how can they take the same test?

- Although teachers use different materials and curricula, students are still expected to 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.

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

- In 2014, changes were made to the reading and math Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students (PAWS) so that they aligned to the updated standards and measured college and career readiness. It is not yet known what new test, if any, will replace the updated PAWS or the ACT suite in high school.

4. Will annual test scores impact schools and districts?

- School-wide test results will be used as one important 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 Wyoming receive a high-quality education.

5. How will test scores impact teachers?

- In the 2020–21 school year, a statewide teacher evaluation framework will be adopted that will require evidence of student learning. Statewide assessment scores can be one measure used to demonstrate student learning, but local assessments can be used as well. Student learning will not count for more than 20% of a teacher's total evaluation.

6. How will test scores impact students?

- There are no assessment requirements for promotion or graduation in Wyoming.

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

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

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

- Wyoming teachers are involved in reviewing PAWS test questions and providing feedback every year.

9. Do students need to be computer literate to take the assessments?

- Students do not need to be computer literate to take the PAWS and ACT. Both assessments are administered with paper and pencil.

10. Where can I go for more information?

- www.edu.wyoming.gov/educators/assessment/
- www.smarterbalanced.org
- www.wyomingmeasuresup.com
- www.BusinessForCore.org