



Annual Statewide Assessments: Frequently Asked Questions

This document is designed to answer some of the most common questions about what the new data from annual statewide assessments that K-12 students took last year actually means for children. In many states, these assessments are brand new and are designed to be aligned to new, higher standards for what students should know and be able to do by the end of each grade to be prepared for college and career.

Why are these scores being released?

Every year, states release the results of annual statewide assessments that every student in the state takes. Data is released about how all students in a school, district, or the state and for individual groups of students are doing, but data about individual students is never made public. These assessments are used to help policymakers understand how well different schools are meeting the needs of students and help parents, students and schools to know how well each student is doing. The results of these tests should be used to make informed decisions about school funding, assignment of teachers, and spending on resources like computers, books and after-school programs.

What does this mean for students?

Many states have adopted new, more rigorous standards like the Common Core State Standards and the scores give parents a sense of how close their child is to meeting the new grade level standard. Parents can use the scores to ask their child's teacher and school about plans they should have for helping their child meet the standard. Parents have a right to know what the test scores mean and to demand that their child's school use the tests to help their child to succeed.

Parents can also compare the scores for different groups of students within schools and between schools and districts to see where student achievement is the highest, where it is the lowest, and where there are the biggest gaps, which is also helpful in knowing if there are trends that all parents can ask the state or school district to address.

How are the new standards related to these tests?

Most states have adopted new, more rigorous academic standards like the Common Core State Standards that are designed to help students develop a deeper understanding of subject matter, learn how to think critically, and apply what they are learning in real-world situations. As a result, states started using new tests that more accurately assess how close students are to meeting the new standards in writing/reading and math.

How are the tests aligned to the new standards different than other tests?

The tests are longer because, unlike the old "fill-in-the-bubble" tests, the new tests have writing sections and asks more conceptual questions that are designed to assess how well students think critically about the material, the depth of their knowledge, and if they can apply what they know to real-life situations. They are also consistent with what a child needs to learn in each grade to graduate from high school prepared to succeed in college and career. The older tests usually didn't tell parents if their children were on track to meet that goal.

What should parents do if their child's score or school's scores are not good?

Parents can schedule a parent-teacher conference to discuss their child's scores with his/her teacher. Teachers should be able to give parents tips for how to help their child at home or recommend services like afterschool programs and tutoring. If parents find that many students in their children's school are not meeting the new standards they can request a meeting with their child's principal or school superintendent to find out what they plan to do to provide extra help and resources to children who may not be on track.

How will this help my community?

These scores give parents data that they can use to become an effective advocate for their child and other children in their neighborhood. The scores are supposed to play a role in the decisions that the state and school districts make. Parents can ensure this happens by using the scores to push the state and school district to do more to educate all students and provide students with the necessary supports to succeed.

