



PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW GRADES 3–8 Assessments in Nevada

In October 2010, Nevada adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) as the basis for the Nevada Academic Content Standards (NVACS) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The State Board of Education and the Nevada Council to Establish Academic Standards for Public Schools carried out the adoption. The new standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn in English language arts and mathematics as they progress through grades K–12.

In the 2014-15 school year, Nevada will administer new assessments aligned to the NVACS for grades 3–8. The new assessments will continue to gauge how well students are mastering the standards—and, ultimately, how ready students are to succeed in college and careers. The high school assessment system, including end-of-course exams and an 11th grade assessment of college and career readiness, is currently under consideration by the Nevada State Board of Education and will also be rolled out in the 2014–15 school year.

WHAT ARE THE NEVADA ACADEMIC CONTENT STANDARDS IN ENGLISH LANGUAGE ARTS AND MATHEMATICS?

The NVACS in ELA and mathematics are designed to enhance and improve student learning by providing greater clarity and rigor than previous standards. They are more relevant to the real world, giving young people the knowledge and skills they need for college and career success, ensuring a future U.S. workforce that can compete in the global economy.

The new standards emphasize not only procedural skills but also conceptual and critical thinking. The NVACS in ELA and mathematics build knowledge from grade to grade, enabling students to master important concepts before moving on to others.

The standards are not a curriculum. Decisions about curriculum, tools, instructional materials, and textbooks are left to local districts and schools that know their students best.

The NVACS in ELA and mathematics based on the CCSS were developed through a state-led initiative, spearheaded by governors and state superintendents, in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, college faculty, parents, and education experts. They build on the excellent foundation laid across all states and have been internationally benchmarked with top performing nations.

Beginning in 2011, Nevada began the implementation of the NVACS in ELA and mathematics. To prepare classrooms for full implementation by 2013, teachers and administrators have taken part and continue to participate in a wide range of educational activities.

THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

- Overview of new assessments, which measure student proficiency against more rigorous standards
- Sample test items
- Overview of accountability for students, teachers, and schools
- Additional resources for parents

New Assessments

WHY NEW ASSESSMENTS?

Teachers and principals talk a lot about assessments, which are used to measure students' academic achievement on the road to mastery of the standards. This document highlights the end-of-year summative assessments, which judge student progress toward mastering state standards and school effectiveness. For other assessments used, see box at right.

New summative assessments will address longstanding concerns that parents, educators, and employers have had about current state assessments—namely that they measure students' ability to perform skills rather than to think critically and apply knowledge.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT THE NEW SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS?

The new assessments for ELA and mathematics will allow educators to track their understanding of student progress from grade to grade, and just as importantly, identify any gaps in progress so schools and districts can address them before students enter high school.

Types of assessments

Formative: A deliberate process utilized by teachers and students during instruction to provide feedback, which is then used to adjust ongoing teaching and learning strategies.

Interim: An assessment repeated at set intervals to measure student growth over time.

Summative: A one-time assessment administered by the teacher, district, or state to measure student performance against a specific set of standards at a specific point in time.

This document addresses summative assessments.

ELA Assessments will demonstrate:

- Student's ability to read and comprehend texts of varying complexities.
- How well students can use evidence from these texts to answer questions, make inferences, and present persuasive arguments
- To what degree students can use context to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary
- An emphasis on literacy across all subject areas

Mathematics assessments will demonstrate:

- Students' ability to solve multi-step problems, conceptual questions, and real-world applications
- Students' ability to explain how they arrived at the correct answer in addition to solving the problem

Benefits of new assessments

- Scores provide students, parents, and teachers with insight into readiness for grade-level transitions early enough to address issues and provide extra support where needed.
- Nevada will be transitioning to “computer adaptive assessments,” which replace pencil-and-paper tests and can adjust the difficulty of questions based on student responses. A student who answers correctly will receive a more challenging item, while an incorrect answer generates an easier question. This method provides students with a more engaging test experience, especially for low- or high-achieving students, and produces more accurate results than traditional methods.
- School districts have access to sample questions and online practice tests to help teachers and parents prepare their children for new assessments.
- The new assessments are designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners—allowing all students to perform to their potential. Accommodations will be available to students with the goal of making the assessments more accessible and to produce results that are valid for these students. The intention is not to give them an advantage over other students. For students with disabilities, the online assessments will address visual, auditory, and physical-access barriers.

Who is developing the new assessments?

Nevada is a governing state in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. State, district, and school educators from Nevada have been involved in the design and development of the Smarter Balanced Assessment System. The final decisions about assessments remain at the state level, in partnership with local educators. Read more about the Smarter Balanced at www.SmarterBalanced.org

College Readiness Defined:

Being college ready means being able to succeed in introductory courses at post-secondary institutions—those that are credit-bearing and transferable. In English language arts/literacy this means demonstrating reading, writing, listening, and research skills, as well as knowledge of specific subject areas needed for entry-level English and composition courses. In math, this means demonstrating foundational knowledge and quantitative reasoning skills, along with specific subject area knowledge (like algebra) needed for entry-level math and statistics courses.

Sample assessment questions

The following questions are representative of those found on the new assessments. For more examples, www.smarterbalanced.org/pilot-test.

EXAMPLE OF A 4TH GRADE MATHEMATICS QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

1. The two-eyed space creatures, three-eyed space creatures, and four-eyed space creatures are having a contest to create a group with 24 total eyes.

How many four-eyed space creatures are needed to make a group with 24 eyes?



2. Somebody told the five-eyed space creatures that they could not join the contest.

Explain why five-eyed space creatures cannot make a group with 24 eyes.

1.

2.

EXAMPLE OF A 5TH GRADE MATHEMATICS QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

Five swimmers compete in a 50-meter race. The finish time for each swimmer is shown in the video.

	23.42		23.35
	23.18		23.24
	23.21		

Explain how the results of the race would change if the race used a clock that rounded to the nearest tenth.

Explanation:

EXAMPLE OF A 6TH GRADE READING QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

Students are asked to read the essay "Planes on the Brain" by Elisabeth Deffner, from *Faces Magazine*, and answer the following questions:

1. How does the author emphasize the point that the TAM program was a positive influence on the sisters' lives? Use details from the text to support your answer.
2. Highlight the parts of the text that provide evidence to support the idea that the Tuskegee Airmen were historically important.
3. What does the author mean by "the sky is no longer the limit"? Use details from the text to support your response.

Answer:

What Parents Can Expect

This is a new system with a new delivery of assessments. Therefore, it is not possible to directly compare new scores with old ones.

The new assessments measure deeper knowledge and skills deemed particularly important to students' futures, including problem-solving, writing, and critical thinking.

Because rigor is higher, student achievement scores may initially be lower.

A dip should not necessarily be interpreted as a decline in student learning or in educator performance. The short-term decline is expected to reverse as educators and students become more familiar with the standards and better equipped to meet the challenges they present.

How will schools support students during the transition?

Schools have created a variety of models to assist students who are struggling with the standards. Remediation and summer courses, in-class adjustments based on ongoing formative assessment results, and pull-out tutoring are just a few support strategies.

*** TAKE ACTION: Parents can work with school or district curriculum directors to learn about the new curriculum and understand how to support their children to minimize any dips in assessment scores.**

There is currently no state policy regarding use of assessments to determine student retention or remediation in grades 3–8. Instead, parents should work with their child's school and teachers to develop a plan for supporting a student who does not meet proficiency.

How will teachers be held accountable?

Linking student achievement with educator performance is a critical factor within the new Nevada Educator Performance Framework. Under the new Framework, 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation will be based upon student performance, which includes student achievement and growth as reflected in assessment scores, among many other factors. The framework will not be fully implemented until validation studies are conducted.

How will schools be held accountable?

The Nevada School Performance Framework (NSPF) is the Nevada school system's accountability system. The NSPF classifies schools within a five-star performance-rating system that includes multiple measures of student achievement and growth and aligns the designations for schools to the delivery of appropriate supports and rewards. The new assessments will be used as a measure of student achievement and student growth over time.

*** TAKE ACTION: Parents need to pay close attention to the new accountability system put in place so they can better advocate for their children. Parents' collective voice is critical to ensure that testing is implemented well and with enough resources to ensure success. Nevada should include parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration, and respect. If you would like additional details on accountability or more information on assessments in general, please visit <http://www.doe.nv.gov> or contact your local school district, principal, or teachers. Here are some questions that you might want to ask:**

- What will happen if my child does not meet proficiency on the new assessments?
- How will teacher evaluations be affected if students don't meet proficiency levels?
- How will school ratings change based on results of the new assessments?

Preparing and supporting your child

- Discuss the new tests with your child. Make sure he or she is not scared or anxious going into the new tests.
- With an older child, explain that the new assessments were created to ensure he or she is on track to succeed in school.
- Explain to your child that the tests will initially be more challenging. Tell your child you have high expectations and that you are there to help every step of the way.
- Review test results with your child, taking time to discuss areas of strength and areas where there is room for improvement. Bring the teacher into the discussion as needed.
- Provide a quiet, comfortable place for studying at home and make sure your child gets a good night's sleep before a test.

Staying informed and involved

- Become familiar with the NVACS in ELA and mathematics by visiting: http://www.doe.nv.gov/Topic/Standards_Topic
- Explore practice tests through an interactive online platform by visiting: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/pilot-test>
- Read all comments written by the teacher on assignments, tests, and report cards. Ask teachers to explain anything that is unclear and discuss how you can best work together to address educational progress.
- Monitor your child's progress. If your child needs extra help or wants to learn more about a subject, work with his or her teacher to identify opportunities for tutoring, after-school clubs, or other resources.
- Understand that a single test score does not represent all that your child can or cannot do. It is a snapshot only. Assessment scores are useful but should not be the only factor in determining a child's academic growth.
- Communicate with your child's teacher as often as possible to discuss his or her progress. Ask for activities to do at home to help prepare for tests and improve your child's progress.

Additional Resources

- For continued updates regarding Nevada's implementation of the NVACS, visit the NVACS website: http://www.doe.nv.gov/Topic/Standards_Topic
- For a more detailed look at what the NVACS in ELA and mathematics, based on the CCSS, means at each grade level, visit: www.pta.org/parents
- For more information on the Smarter Balanced consortium, of which Nevada is a governing state, visit: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org>