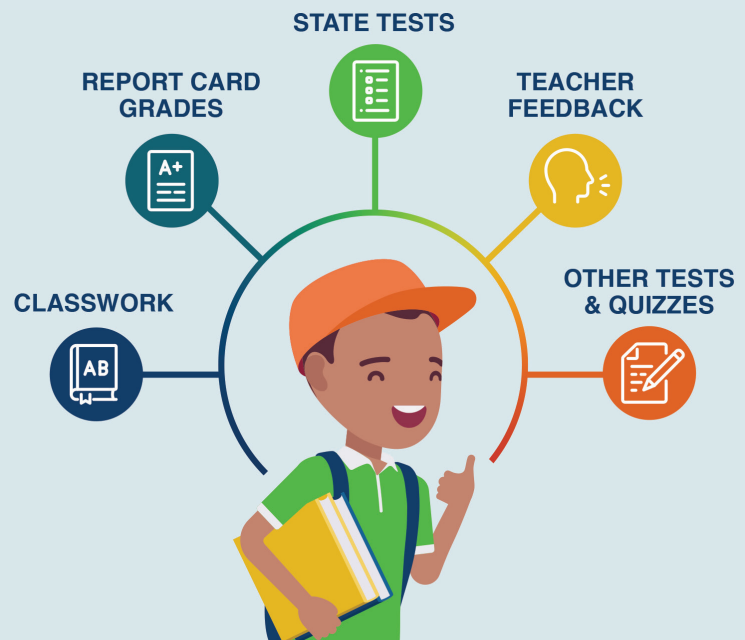




## A FAMILY GUIDE TO ANNUAL STATE TESTS IN NEBRASKA: One of Many Measures of Student Learning

There are many ways to measure academic performance, and annual state tests are only one of them. These tests are not meant to tell the whole story. They are meant to be combined with other measures, including teacher feedback, classwork and projects, and report card grades. Together, these measures can give families a more complete picture of a student's performance so they can better support learning at home and advocate for their child.



### State Assessments 101

The Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA, requires students to take state tests in reading and math every year in third through eighth grade and once in high school. In Nebraska, students in third through eighth grade take the Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS) in English language arts and math. Students in fifth and eighth grade also take NSCAS in science. High school students take the ACT in 11th grade which includes reading, writing, math and science.

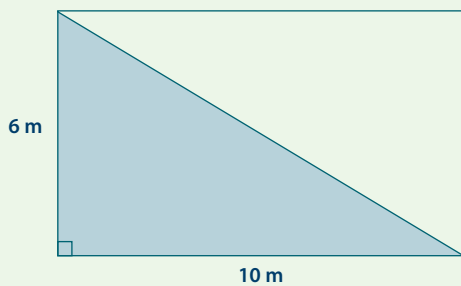
## A Focus on Grade Level Skills

Unlike other tests, NSCAS is focused on grade level material and is aligned to the state standards. The test questions match what students do and learn in the classroom every day throughout the year, which are the skills that are most important for students to learn in order to move on to more challenging content.

The NSCAS tests are taken online. They include a variety of different types of questions, including traditional multiple choice, short answer and questions that ask students to explain their answer.

### Grade 6: Math

Use the diagram to answer the question.



What is the area of the shaded triangle?  
Enter the answer in the box.

m<sup>2</sup>

### Grade 3: ELA

Read the story.

[1] Milan and his dad were excited to go to the outdoor market. They especially liked tasting the fresh peaches.

[2] A woman selling peaches handed one to Dad. Dad took a bite. "This is delicious," said Dad as he gave it to Milan.

[3] Milan agreed. The peach was wonderful. Dad pointed to where a band was playing. "Let's go listen," said Dad.

[4] "The band is too loud," said Milan. "Let's keep walking."

[5] They got to a stand with samples of drinks made from vegetables. The samples were green! Milan thought they were strange. Dad drank five different samples. He said they all tasted great.

How are Dad's ideas **different** from Milan's ideas? Choose **two** answers.

- 1. Dad likes trying new things.
- 2. Dad thinks peaches taste good.
- 3. Dad wants to listen to the band.
- 4. Dad is excited to go to the market.



## Useful Information for All

### **FAMILIES:** Understanding Grade Level Performance

The NSCAS report gives families information on how well their child performed on different sets of skills in each subject. Families can use this information to identify where their child is doing well and where they may need support or practice. This helps families better support learning at home. It can also help them start meaningful conversations with teachers, to set goals for each student's areas of improvement and identify resources and strategies that can be used at home and in school to help students make progress.

#### **Questions to Ask the Teacher about Your Child's NSCAS Report :**

- What does this mean about my child's learning?
- Is my child on grade level?
- Where does my child need more support or improvement?
- What are short term learning goals for my child to measure/show progress?
- How can I support learning at home?



### **TEACHERS:** Informing Instruction

Students take different types of tests throughout the school year. Some students take benchmark or diagnostic tests, such as MAP Growth. These are taken several times a year and measure mastery of important concepts and skills in reading and math. Students take a test at the beginning of the year to identify their “starting point” and again throughout the year to measure their progress. Benchmark tests help teachers identify and address learning gaps early on so students can stay on track to meet grade level expectations. While NSCAS is only given at the end of the school year, it is one way of showing how much progress students made from the beginning of the year and how well they met grade level expectations.

While teachers use NSCAS results to understand each student's unique needs and support them in the areas where they need extra help, they also help teachers to improve their instruction. Teachers can use the results to look for trends in their students' learning to see what skills or concepts students learned and what content they struggled with. This helps teachers identify what they taught effectively and where they need to improve or change their instructional strategies.

### **SCHOOL & DISTRICT LEADERS: Informing Decisions**

NSCAS results are critical for school and district leaders to make informed decisions about schools and students. School and district level test scores show leaders how students across a school or district are performing and indicate if a certain group of students or schools need more support. This allows them to target additional support or resources to help those schools improve. District leaders can also use NSCAS scores to understand what strategies and changes are working.



### **STATE LEADERS: Helping Schools Improve**

State leaders use NSCAS results to identify schools and districts that need more support and resources. They identify the schools with the lowest performance in the state, as well as schools with certain groups of students that performed much lower on the test than the rest of the students in that school. These schools receive additional funding and resources from the state to support students and teachers. For example, schools may hire more teachers or tutors or they may purchase additional instructional materials and programs, depending on the needs of their students.

#### **Where Can I Go for More Information?**

- For more information, visit [Education.NE.gov/Assessment/NSCAS-system/](https://Education.NE.gov/Assessment/NSCAS-system/)
- To see a practice test, visit [NWEA.Force.com/NWEAConnection/s/Nebraska-Practice-Tests?language=en\\_US](https://NWEA.Force.com/NWEAConnection/s/Nebraska-Practice-Tests?language=en_US)
- For a guide to your child's score report, visit [CDN.NWEA.org/docs/NE/NSCAS+Interpretive+Guide+for+Parents+FINAL.pdf](https://CDN.NWEA.org/docs/NE/NSCAS+Interpretive+Guide+for+Parents+FINAL.pdf)
- For ideas on how to support your child's learning at home, visit [PTA.org/FamilyGuides](https://PTA.org/FamilyGuides)
- For more information about the Nebraska PTA, visit [NebraskaPTA.org/home](https://NebraskaPTA.org/home)

