



# PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW ASSESSMENTS IN ARIZONA

**AzMERIT (Arizona's Measurement of Educational Readiness to Inform Teaching) is Arizona's new statewide achievement test.**

**In spring 2015, students in Arizona were tested using AzMERIT, which is an assessment aligned to Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards, which were adopted in 2010. Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards are the instructional standards intended to help Arizona teachers guide their students to be successful upon graduation from high school.**

The new assessments gauge how well students are mastering the standards—and ultimately how ready they are for the next grade and for college and careers after graduation.

## **WHY NEW ASSESSMENTS?**

Teachers and principals talk a lot about assessments, which are used to measure students' academic achievement. This document highlights the end-of-year summative assessments,

which judge (1) student progress toward mastering state standards, and (2) are used as one measure of program and school effectiveness. For other assessments used in schools, see the box above.

New summative AzMERIT assessments will address longstanding concerns that parents, educators and employers have had about state assessments—namely that they measure ability to memorize facts, rather than the skills to think critically and apply knowledge.

## **Types of assessments**

**Classroom-based:** Individual tests given by teachers as needed throughout the year to assess knowledge and skills in specific areas

**Interim:** The same test repeated at set intervals to measure student growth over time

**Summative:** End-of-year assessments administered by the state to measure student performance against a common set of standards

*This document addresses summative assessments.*

## **THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:**

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



## What is AzMERIT?

The Arizona Measurement of Educational Readiness to Inform Teaching is the new state test that replaced the AIMS tests for Reading, Writing and Math. This is a computer-based test that measures how students are mastering the 2010 state standards in English and mathematics.

Not every school will take the test online this year, but this is the ultimate goal. If schools do not have the technological capability, paper-and-pencil versions will be available.

It is important to note that Arizona teachers, parents and community members reviewed and provided feedback on both the reading passages and test items.

## What is different about the new assessments?

The new assessments for English and mathematics will enable educators to deepen their understanding of student progress from grade to grade—and, just as importantly, identify any gaps in progress so they can address them **well before students enter college or the workforce.**

### AzMERIT will measure:

- Whether students can read and comprehend texts of varying complexities.
- How well students can integrate information across sources to make a persuasive argument.
- The degree to which students can use context to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary.
- Whether students understand and can use important math ideas, including number sense, algebraic thinking, geometry and data analysis.
- The extent to which students can use math facts and reasoning skills to solve real-world problems.
- How well students can make math arguments.

# Benefits of New AzMERIT Assessments:

- The assessments allow students to show their work and explain their reasoning, which will help educators better understand what students know, and where there are gaps in learning that need to be addressed.
- Rather than focusing on what a child has memorized through multiple-choice questions, the new tests ask students to apply skills like thinking, reasoning and justifying answers—showing what they know and can do.
- The tests do not lend themselves to “teaching to the test.” Since they focus on applying skills, it is the daily practice of these skills in the classroom that will serve as the best preparation for the tests.
- Computer-based assessments will eventually replace pencil-and-paper tests (exceptions will be made for schools that do not yet have the technology). Computer-based assessments are more efficient, innovative and engaging, and they enable insight into student progress at multiple points.
- The new assessments are designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English-language learners.



## College and career readiness defined:

The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree, or in a high-quality certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement.

# Sample Questions by Grade Band

The following samples provide students, teachers and families the opportunity to become familiar with the item types and tools on the AzMERIT test. For more examples, visit: [azmeritportal.org](http://azmeritportal.org)

## EXAMPLE OF AN EQUATION EDITOR STUDENTS IN GRADES 3-5 WILL USE TO RECORD THEIR ANSWER.

Consider the equation  $d \div 3 = 12$  remainder 2.

- What is the dividend,  $d$ ?
- What would the dividend,  $d$ , be if there was no remainder?

Enter each answer on a separate line.

◀ ▶ ✕									
1	2	3	+	-	x	÷			
4	5	6	<	=	>				
7	8	9							
0	.	%							

## EXAMPLE OF AN OPEN-RESPONSE ITEM. OPEN-RESPONSE ITEMS REQUIRE YOU TO USE THE KEYBOARD TO ENTER THE RESPONSE INTO A TEXT FIELD.

The base and height of a triangle are each equal to the side length of a square. How does the area of the triangle relate to the area of the square? Type your answer in the space provided.

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## EXAMPLE OF AN OPEN-RESPONSE ITEM.

### Online Learning

1. Learning new things is an exciting part of life. Learning can happen anywhere. There are kids who learn at school, kids who learn at home and some kids who learn online. Students who learn this way use their computers and the Internet to connect to online classrooms. They use a camera connected to their home computer to let the teacher and other students see them. They can see their teacher and classmates on their screens because their classmates and teacher use a camera, too.
2. Before the Internet, children in remote places sometimes had classes over the radio or used the mail to get lessons and return them. For example, in the past, children who lived in distant parts of Australia were taught using the radio. Every day at a certain time, they tuned in to a special radio station. All the children could hear their teacher at the same time, but they were hundreds of miles apart. They got their lessons in the mail, did their homework, and mailed it back to the teacher.
3. Today, students who live far away from their teacher have classes on the Internet. In some online classrooms, a classroom full of kids can use a special computer program at the same time as the teacher. The students can live in one country, and the teacher, can be located in a different country. Still, it 's just like a classroom at your school. The teacher can teach the kids. The kids can ask questions. Everyone can see and hear everything that's being said as it happens.

What is the main idea of paragraph 3?  
Type your answer in the space provided.



# What Parents Can Expect



**The AzMERIT assessments measure deep knowledge and skills deemed particularly important for students' futures, including problem-solving, writing and critical thinking.**

**Because Arizona's College and Career Ready standards are more rigorous, student achievement scores may initially be lower. A dip the first year should not be interpreted as a decline in student learning or in educator performance. Educators expect the short-term decline to improve as teachers and students become more familiar with the instructional standards and are 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 to meet the achievement standards. Remediation and summer courses, in-class adjustments based on ongoing in-class assessment results and pull-out tutoring are just a few support strategies. Parents should collaborate with teachers and administrators to develop a plan as needed.

## How will students be held accountable?

While the formula for determining students' grades remains at the district level, educators will have the opportunity to factor in the new, more rigorous end-of-year state assessments. Class grades will continue to include other factors, such as attendance, participation and course-level assessments.

Already required by the state's Move On When Reading law, grade 3 students will not be promoted to grade 4 if their score demonstrates they are reading far below the grade 3 level on the reading portion of the state assessment, unless they meet specific exemptions. Parents with students in grades K-3 should work with the school to develop a plan to ensure their student will be reading at the appropriate level by the time they are tested at the end of grade 3. For more information on the Move On requirement, visit: [azed.gov/mowr](http://azed.gov/mowr)

## How will teachers be held accountable?

When a timeline is determined, a portion of the evaluation of teachers and principals will be based on how well students perform on AzMERIT. Evaluations must also include the educational growth that students show over time. Districts and charters may also include other data in evaluations for teachers and principals.

## How will schools be held accountable?

To hold schools accountable in a fair and systematic fashion, each Arizona school and district receives a report card with a letter grade that reflects its annual academic profile. A-F letter grades are based on student test performance and student academic growth from year to year as well as other important indications of school performance such as graduation rate. The board is currently discussing how AzMERIT results will be used to help calculate A-F letter grades.



# Take Action

**Parents are their child's best advocates. As a parent and your child's first teacher, you should be informed of the assessment and accountability system that is in place in your child's school. Parents and families must be at the table with school leaders and school districts to ensure that testing is implemented well, and with enough resources to ensure success.**

The Arizona Department of Education should include parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration and respect. For additional details about the state's assessment and accountability plan, please email the AzMERIT inbox at [AzMERIT@azed.gov](mailto:AzMERIT@azed.gov) or visit their website at: [azed.gov/assessment](http://azed.gov/assessment) or [azed.gov/accountability](http://azed.gov/accountability)

Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- How many assessments will my child take this school year and where can I access/view the assessment calendar?
- What will happen if my child does not meet proficiency levels on the new assessments?
- How will the results of tests be used to support my child's learning?
- What can I do, as a parent, to help my child do his or her best?
- How will school evaluations be affected based on results of the new assessments?

Also, be sure to speak with your local school administrators! Ask them to host a parent night in the spring to explain the tests, and in the fall to explain test results.

Below is the list of policies and practices that National PTA supports. Check with the Arizona Department of Education to determine if their policies and practices are closely aligned with those of the PTA.

- National PTA believes that valid assessment does not consist of only a single test score, and that at no time should a single test be considered the sole determinant of a student's academic or work future.
- National PTA supports nationally agreed-upon voluntary standards if they are derived by consensus at the state and local levels. Parents must be involved in this process.
- National PTA believes that assessments provide valuable information to parents, teachers and school leaders about the growth and achievement of their students. Furthermore, having annual data on the performance of students can help inform teaching and learning, as well as identify achievement gaps among groups of students within a school and among a school district. National PTA believes assessments are essential to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education.

# Preparing and Supporting Your Child

- Review the testing calendar and work with your child's school to ensure there will be regular and clear communications from the school on the assessments, the results and how they are used.
- Discuss the new tests with your children. Make sure they feel comfortable and understand why they are taking a test.
- Make sure your child has a comfortable place for studying, and is prepared mentally and physically for a test.
- With older children, explain that the new assessments were created to make sure they are on track to succeed after graduation, and to identify any issues early enough to give them more support.
- Explain to your child that the tests will initially be more challenging. Tell your child you have high expectations and that you and the teachers are there to help every step of the way.
- Review test results with your child and his or her teacher.

## Staying informed and involved

- Become familiar with Arizona's College and Career Ready Standards, visit: [azed.gov/standards-practices](http://azed.gov/standards-practices)
- Learn more about AzMERIT, visit: [azed.gov/assessment/azmerit](http://azed.gov/assessment/azmerit)
- Read all comments written by the teacher on classroom lessons and tests. Ask teachers to explain anything that is unclear, and discuss how you can best work together to address areas of improvement for your child.
- Monitor your child's progress and regularly communicate with your child's teachers. 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.
- Tests are not perfect measures of what a child can do—there are many other factors that might influence a test score. For example, a child can be affected by the way he or she is feeling on test day, or the particular classroom setting.
- Meet 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 proficiency.

## Additional resources

- Visit the Arizona Department of Education website: [azed.gov](http://azed.gov)