



# PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW ASSESSMENTS IN FLORIDA

Students first took the new Florida Standards Assessments (FSA) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics in spring 2015. The new assessments are aligned to the new Florida Standards, which have been in place since 2014. 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.

It is important to note that while assessments are a critical component of the state's accountability system, they are just one of the many ways that parents can determine whether or not their students have mastered the skills and concepts they are expected to know in each subject and grade. The Department of Education encourages parents to remain involved in their students' education and work closely with their students' educators throughout the school year. This will enable them to stay informed about their student's classroom performance and help determine whether additional assistance and/or intervention would help increase the students' academic success.

## 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) program and school effectiveness. For other assessments used, see box at right.

## Types of assessments

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

**Interim:** Interim assessments are administered at certain times during the school year, and can be used to predict a student's ability to succeed on a summative assessment or to diagnose student-learning gaps. Interim assessments can also be used to determine whether a student's academic performance is improving. These assessments may factor into student course grades

**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 students' mastery of the Florida Standards
- Overview of accountability for students, teachers and schools
- Additional resources for parents

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

## What is different about the new assessments?

The new assessments for English language arts 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.**

### English language arts (ELA) assessments 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.

### New mathematics assessments:

- 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 mathematical arguments.



# Benefits of new assessments:



- The assessments allow students to show their work and explain their reasoning so teachers can better understand what they 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 students with documented disabilities for whom computer-based testing is not appropriate). Computer-based assessments are more efficient, innovative and engaging, and they enable insight into student progress at multiple points. They also ensure students will be prepared to succeed in a world that relies on knowledge of and competency with technology.
- 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:

Students are considered college and career ready when they have the knowledge, skills, and academic preparation needed to enroll and succeed in introductory college credit-bearing courses within an associate or baccalaureate degree program without the need for remediation. These same attributes and levels of achievement are needed for entry into and success in postsecondary workforce education or directly into a job that offers gainful employment and career advancement.

# What Parents Can Expect

**The FSA is designed to measure the new, more rigorous expectations of the state standards. Because the tests measure complex skills, which are different from the skills measured by previous state tests, scores on FSA might look lower. But students aren't doing worse—it's just that the bar is higher.**

**As students and teachers gain the skills and knowledge needed to meet the new higher standards, performance will also improve. In previous years, when Florida transitioned to more rigorous standards and assessments, schools and students rose to the challenge and improved over time.**

**To become familiar with the new tests and testing system, visit:**  
[fsassessments.org/students-and-families/practice-tests](https://fsassessments.org/students-and-families/practice-tests)

## **HOW SHOULD PARENTS INTERPRET SCORE REPORTS?**

The Department of Education recently unveiled a newly-redesigned score report for the Florida Standards Assessments (FSA), statewide science assessments and statewide end-of-course assessments. The score report aims to provide a clear depiction of student performance so parents and educators can work together to help their students improve.

After a thorough review of the previous score report, the department determined that there were ways the score report could be revised to make it more meaningful. One of the key concerns that needed to be addressed was the tendency to use the terms "satisfactory" and "proficient" interchangeably, although they actually represent two different levels of mastery. "Satisfactory" is representative of level 3, while "proficient" is really a more appropriate term to describe level 4.

To address this common misconception and provide additional clarity, the department incorporated the following features into the newly-redesigned score report:

- Color-coded levels (1-5), so it is apparent which level the student achieved at first glance
- Clear explanation of what each level means, including the difference between satisfactory and proficient, with additional detail about the level that the student achieved
- Comparison of the student's performance to other students in their school, district and the state
- References to specific Department of Education websites that offer resources parents and students can use to increase preparation for the next grade

More information about the new score report is available online at:  
[fldoe.org/accountability/assessments/fsa-report.stml](https://fldoe.org/accountability/assessments/fsa-report.stml)

## How will schools support students during the transition?

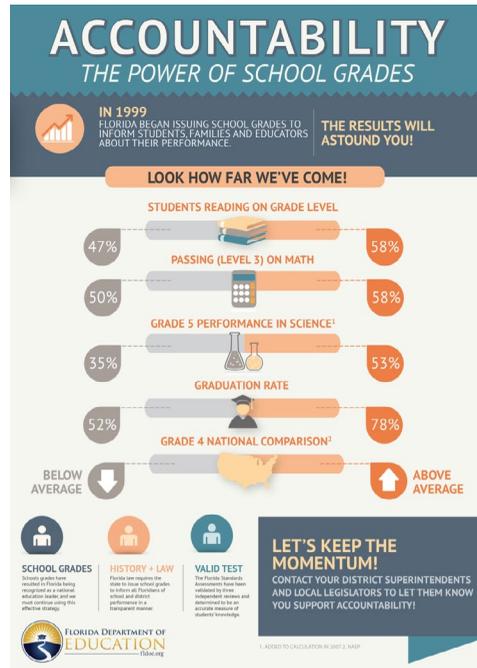
Schools have created a variety of models to assist students who are struggling with the standards. Remediation and summer courses, in-class adjustments based on ongoing in-class assessment results and tutoring are just a few support strategies. Parents should collaborate with teachers and administrators to develop a plan as needed.

## How will students, teachers and schools be held accountable?

Florida students have long benefited from a strong accountability system in the Department of Education. The department releases school grades annually to provide students, parents, educators, district leaders and members of the public the information they need to help students improve.

The new plan will also articulate teacher accountability measures, ensuring that teacher effectiveness ratings are measured against student progress throughout the year. In the meantime, teacher evaluation criteria will remain the same.

Each time a new assessment is administered, the Florida Department of Education initiates a comprehensive review process to determine the assessment's passing scores and from those scores develops a new rule to set the achievement level standards for the assessment. In calculating school grades for the 2014-15 school year, the new performance standards were needed to establish the informational baseline for schools to work toward improved performance in future years.





Since 2015 was the first year that the Florida Standards Assessments were administered, the department had to go through this process, which concluded on Jan. 6, 2016 when the State Board of Education voted in favor of Commissioner Stewart’s recommendations. The rule went into effect on Feb. 9, 2016, and the 2014-15 informational baseline school grades were released shortly after.

Under the new rule, the purpose of school grades remains largely the same, but there are some components of the current formula that are different from previous ones. For instance, because assessment performance is a factor in school grades and the passing scores are more rigorous for the Florida Standards Assessment than previous assessments, it is more difficult for a school to achieve high scores on the achievement components of the school grade. Also, provisions such as the “safety net” that prevented schools from dropping multiple letter grades in one year, are not part of the new school grades rule, as they are no longer permitted since the school grade calculation was overhauled by law in 2014.

The guidelines for promotion and graduation will remain largely the same as they were before FSA. Some students who do not achieve certain scores may still be promoted through already available exemptions. Other students will have opportunities to retake tests.



# 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 Florida Department of Education is committed to including parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration and respect. For additional details about the state's assessment and accountability system, please call the Department or visit [fldoe.org](http://fldoe.org). If you have questions, you may submit them at [fldoe.org/accountability/assessments/k-12-student-assessment/customer-feedback-form.stml](http://fldoe.org/accountability/assessments/k-12-student-assessment/customer-feedback-form.stml), and Florida Department of Education staff will respond promptly. 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 achieve "satisfactory" level 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?

Below is the list of policies and practices that National PTA supports. Check with the Florida Department of Education to determine if Florida's 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.
- 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.
- Make sure your child has a comfortable place for studying and is prepared mentally and physically for a test.

## Staying informed and involved:

- Become familiar with the new Florida Standards and the FSA, visit: [fldoe.org/accountability/assessments/k-12-student-assessment/fsa.html](http://fldoe.org/accountability/assessments/k-12-student-assessment/fsa.html)
- 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 progress. Ask for activities to do at home to help prepare for tests and improve your child's proficiency.

## Additional Resources

- Visit the Florida Department of Education website: [fldoe.org](http://fldoe.org)