

PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW ASSESSMENTS IN LOUISIANA

In 2016, students in grades 3-11 in Louisiana will take assessments covering English, reading, mathematics and science aligned to the Louisiana Student Standards. Also this year, students in grades 3-8 will field test the new social studies assessment, which will be operational during the 2016-2017 school year.

New Louisiana assessments by grade include the following:

- Grades 3-8: social studies field test (optional)
- Grades 8-9: EXPLORE test (optional)
- Grade 10: PLAN test
- Grade 11: ACT test
- High School:
 - End-of-course exams: English II & III, Algebra I, Geometry, US History and Biology
 - WorkKeys career assessment (as determined)

THE ROLE OF ASSESSMENTS

The state of Louisiana believes that all students can achieve rigorous academic standards. Therefore, it is essential that educators continuously measure progress to ensure that students remain on track for college and careers.

Louisiana students are assessed annually in grades 3-8 and in high school depending on course enrollment. Students in grades 3-8 take the LEAP assessments in English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. In high school, students take standard assessments referred to as End-of-Course (EOC) tests in six subjects: Algebra I, Geometry, English II, English III, Biology and U.S. History. The assessments measure students' proficiency in each subject area—and ultimately how ready they are for the next grade and for college and careers after graduation.

Types of assessments

Classroom-based: Individual tests given by teachers as needed throughout the year to assess knowledge and skills in specific areas (e.g.: Teacher designed unit or end-of semester tests)

Interim: The same test repeated at set intervals to measure student growth over time (e.g.: DIBELS)

Summative: End-of-year assessments administered by the state to measure student performance against a common set of standards (e.g.: LEAP and EOCs)

This document addresses summative assessments.

THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

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



This document highlights the end-of-year assessments, which measure (1) student progress toward mastering state standards and (2) program and school effectiveness. For other assessments used by schools and school systems, see box on previous page.

What changes have occurred in the last couple of years to Louisiana state assessments for grades 3-8?

Starting in spring 2015, students in grades 3-8 took new statewide assessments in math and English language arts. These tests were designed to match the new, more rigorous standards that are guiding classroom instruction and focus on the critical-thinking, problem-solving and reasoning skills students need in today's world.

The new assessments also 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.**

ELA assessments demonstrate:

- Whether students can read and understand texts of varying complexities.
- How well students can use information from multiple sources to support their answer.
- The degree to which students can use information from texts to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary.

Math assessments demonstrate:

- 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 knowledge and skills to solve real-world problems.
- How well students can apply mathematical reasoning and modeling.

Benefits of more rigorous assessments:



- The assessments provide students with more opportunities 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, 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.
- Schools will offer computer-based and pencil and paper assessments, depending on the test.
- The new assessments provide opportunities for all students to demonstrate mastery of grade-level material, 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 level

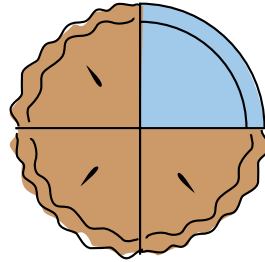
The following questions are examples from the spring 2015 assessments.

EXAMPLE OF A 4TH GRADE MATH QUESTION

Jesmine ate $\frac{1}{4}$ of a pie. She drew a model to represent the fraction of the pie that she ate.

Which fraction is equivalent to the fraction of the pie that Jesmine ate?

- A. $\frac{2}{5}$
- B. $\frac{3}{6}$
- C. $\frac{2}{8}$
- D. $\frac{1}{12}$



EXAMPLE OF AN 8TH GRADE ELA QUESTION

Students are asked to read the folktale “The Fox and the Horse” and answer the following questions to prepare a narrative story:

PART A

In order for this plan to work, what did the fox need most?

- A. The horse had to be a good actor.
- B. The lion had to trust the fox.
- C. The horse had to be patient with the fox.
- D. The lion had to be hungry.

PART B

What does the fox tell the lion that causes the answer to Part A?

- A. The lion should eat his meal in comfort.
- B. Horse meat is delicious.
- C. The horse is dead.
- D. The lion should lie down and wait for the fox to return.



What Parents Can Expect

The new assessments are 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, students and teachers may need more time to gain the skills and knowledge needed to meet the new higher standards. That means you may have seen an initial drop in your child's test scores from this past year, but performance will improve over time. In other states where more rigorous tests have been implemented, students improved their performance after the first year.

LEAP SCORE REPORTS

The score reports give you a snapshot of how your child is progressing and shows where he or she excels or needs more support. This information, along with grades, teacher feedback and scores on other tests, will help give a more complete picture of how well your child is performing academically.

The scores are used to help teachers identify when students need additional support or more challenging work in each subject area. The information will also be used to measure how well schools and districts are helping students achieve higher expectations.

As a parent, you can use the test results to guide a discussion with your child's teacher(s) about additional supports or enrichment that may be needed in class and at home.

Here are some suggested questions to ask when discussing the results with your child's teacher(s):

- Where is my child doing well and where does he or she need improvement?
- What can be done in the classroom to help improve his or her area(s) of weakness?
- What can be done to appropriately challenge my child in areas where he or she exceeds the expectations?
- How can I help support my child's learning at home?
- How do we ensure that my child continues to progress?

For an example of the 2015 score reports, visit louisianabelieves.com/resources/family-support-toolbox. The Louisiana Department of Education will release a Parent Guide to the 2016 LEAP Reports later this summer.



How are school districts and schools held accountable?

The Louisiana Department of Education releases annual school report cards summarizing and evaluating the academic achievement of students and schools. Each report card includes information used to calculate the school's letter grade and overall performance score. This data can be used by parents to determine how well their school is preparing students for the next level of studies, and how it compares to other schools in their district and the state. To see examples of previous report cards, visit: louisianabelieves.com/data/reportcards.

Here are some suggested questions to reflect on when reviewing your school's report card:

- How does my child's performance compare to the average performance in our school?
- How does my school's performance compare to last year? To my district? To the state?
- How are different populations of students performing in my school?

For parent guides to interpreting the data on your school's report card, see:

- Parent Guide to Elementary School Report Cards: [louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/family-support-toolbox-resources/2014-2015-school-report-card-infographic-\(elementary-school\).pdf?sfvrsn=2](http://louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/family-support-toolbox-resources/2014-2015-school-report-card-infographic-(elementary-school).pdf?sfvrsn=2)
- Parent Guide to Middle School Report Cards: [louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/family-support-toolbox-resources/2014-2015-school-report-card-infographic-\(middle-school\).pdf?sfvrsn=2](http://louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/family-support-toolbox-resources/2014-2015-school-report-card-infographic-(middle-school).pdf?sfvrsn=2)
- Parent Guide to Combination School Report Cards: [louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/family-support-toolbox-resources/2014-2015-school-report-card-infographic-\(combination-school\).pdf?sfvrsn=4](http://louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/family-support-toolbox-resources/2014-2015-school-report-card-infographic-(combination-school).pdf?sfvrsn=4)
- Parent Guide to High School Report Cards: [louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/family-support-toolbox-resources/2014-2015-school-report-card-infographic-\(high-school\).pdf?sfvrsn=2](http://louisianabelieves.com/docs/default-source/family-support-toolbox-resources/2014-2015-school-report-card-infographic-(high-school).pdf?sfvrsn=2)

How are students and teachers held accountable?

Teachers and principals in Louisiana are evaluated yearly using the Compass tool, which provides regular, meaningful feedback on their performance. Under this system, every teacher and school leader in each public school is evaluated annually using a four-tiered rating—(1) Highly Effective, (2) Effective: Proficient; (3) Effective: Emerging; and (4) Ineffective. Half of the evaluation is based on student outcomes and the other half of the evaluation is based on observations by a supervisor of their practice in the classroom or school.

For students this year, the state will maintain current 4th grade promotion policies but will allow districts to issue waivers for students demonstrating readiness to progress on to 5th grade even if they do not receive scores on state assessments marking them as eligible for promotion. The state has shifted its 8th grade retention policies to require that instead of 8th grade students being retained for not meeting proficiency standards on the state tests, they will be promoted to 9th grade, where they will receive remediation on the high school campus in a “transitional 9th grade” year.



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.

Louisiana should include parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration and respect. For additional details about the assessment and accountability system, please call the Louisiana Department of Education, (877) 453-2721. 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 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 Department of Education to determine if Louisiana's policies and practices are aligned to National PTA standards.

- 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 school districts. 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 assessments are used to make sure students 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 may be more challenging, but that 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 Louisiana's standards, visit: louisianabelieves.com/academics/academic-standards
- Access and use the assessment resources for parents located in the Family Support Toolbox on the Louisiana Department of Education's website: louisianabelieves.com/resources/family-support-toolbox
- 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

- For more information on assessments in Louisiana, visit: louisianabelieves.com/assessment
- For more information on school and district performance in Louisiana, visit: louisianabelieves.com/data/reportcards
- For information on how Louisiana's students are performing, visit: louisianabelieves.com/accountability/statewide-results