



# PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW ASSESSMENTS IN MISSISSIPPI

The Mississippi Assessment Program features assessments aligned to the Mississippi College and Career Ready Standards (MCCRS). 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) program 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 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 CONTAINS:

- 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 different about the new assessments?

The new assessments for English language arts (ELA) 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.**

### ELA assessments will demonstrate:

- 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.

### Math assessments will 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 math facts and reasoning skills to solve real-world problems.
- How well students can make math 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.
- The tests are computer-based, except for the writing portion of the ELA test. Computer-based assessments are more efficient, innovative and engaging, and they enable insight into student progress at multiple points.
- The new assessments will be designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners.

## College Readiness Defined

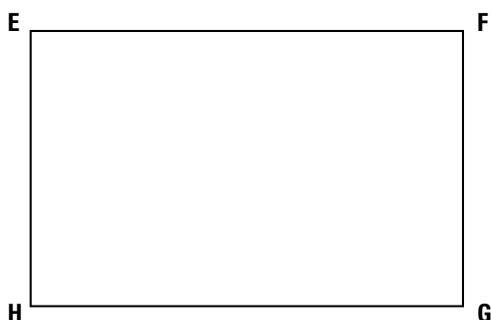
The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree, or in a high-quality certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement.

# Sample Questions by Grade Level

The following questions are representative of those found on the new assessments.

## EXAMPLE OF A FOURTH-GRADE MATH QUESTION

Rectangle EFGH is shown below.



ROW	LINE SEGMENT
A	$\overline{EF}$ and $\overline{FG}$
B	$\overline{EF}$ and $\overline{GH}$
C	$\overline{FG}$ and $\overline{EH}$
D	$\overline{GH}$ and $\overline{HE}$

Directions: Match each set of line segments to the correct relationship.

**Note: Each relationship will be used twice.**

ROW	RELATIONSHIP
1.	Parallel Lines
2.	Perpendicular Lines



### EXAMPLE OF A SIXTH-GRADE ELA QUESTION

Students are asked to read a passage from the non-fiction text, "Mississippian Time Period ca. 1000 AD to 1550 AD," and answer the following:

The Mississippian Time Period was an important time period in the history of Mississippi. In an essay, write about how the characteristics of the time period are still important today. Use evidence from the text to support your response.

Your writing will be scored based on development of idea, organization of writing, and language conventions of grammar, usage and mechanics.

**Write here**



# 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, scores on the test will 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 other states where more rigorous tests have been implemented, students improved their performance after the first year.



#### 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.

## 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 pull-out tutoring are just a few support strategies. Parents should collaborate with teachers and administrators to develop a plan as needed.

## How are school districts and schools held accountable?

The Mississippi Department of Education issues annual accountability ratings for schools and districts using an A-F scale. The ratings are based on assessment results, student growth and the four-year graduation rate.

## How are students and teachers held accountable?

Retention or promotion in the third grade will be affected by a student's performance on the 3rd Grade Reading Summative Assessment. Students in high school must take end-of-course exams in Algebra I, Biology I, U.S. History and English II to be eligible for graduation.

Teachers are evaluated by the Mississippi Teacher Evaluation System (MTES) and principals are evaluated by the Mississippi Principal Evaluation System (MPES). Teacher evaluations take into account individual student growth or student learning objectives. The evaluation of principals includes student performance and leadership.

# 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.**

Mississippi 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 Mississippi Department of Education, (601) 359-3513.

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 Mississippi Department of Education to determine if Mississippi's policies and practices are aligned.

- 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.
- 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 Mississippi's standards, visit: [mde.k12.ms.us/MCCRS](https://mde.k12.ms.us/MCCRS)
- 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 Mississippi, visit: [mde.k12.ms.us/OSA](https://mde.k12.ms.us/OSA)
- For more information on school district performance in Mississippi, visit: [reports.mde.k12.ms.us](https://reports.mde.k12.ms.us)