

PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW ASSESSMENTS IN WISCONSIN

Beginning in spring 2016, Wisconsin students will take the Forward Exam, an online assessment administered in grades 3-8 in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics, grades 4 and 8 in science and grades 4, 8 and 10 in social studies.

High school students will continue to take the ACT suite of exams in grades 9-11. The ACT Aspire in grades 9 and 10 and ACT Plus Writing in grade 11 assess traditional academic subjects—reading, math, science, English and writing—necessary for college course work. The ACT WorkKeys assessment also administered in grade 11 covers applied mathematics, locating information, and reading for information—critical skills for both college and career readiness.

For students with significant cognitive disabilities, Dynamic Learning Maps (DLM) is the assessment given as the alternative to the above-mentioned tests.

Together, these assessments comprise the Wisconsin Student Assessment System. They gauge how well all students are mastering the Wisconsin Academic Standards—and ultimately how ready they are for the next grade and for college and careers after graduation.

Types of assessments

Formative: A deliberate assessment process used by teachers and students during instruction to provide specific, actionable and immediate feedback.

Interim: The same test repeated at set intervals—between instruction—to measure student growth over time

Summative: Assessments designed to measure cumulative student performance against a common set of standards. Can be a district or state test, or a semester exam given by a teacher.

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 different about the new assessments?

The new assessments for ELA and mathematics 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.
- Wisconsin uses computer-based online assessments that are more efficient, innovative and engaging, which allows educators to more effectively measure student growth. 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 and career readiness defined:

All students in Wisconsin graduate from high school academically prepared and socially and emotionally competent. They possess and demonstrate the knowledge, skills and habits necessary for success in college and careers. These proficiencies and attributes come from rigorous, rich and well-rounded public school experiences.

What Parents Can Expect



The state tests in the Wisconsin Student Assessment System are designed to measure the rigorous expectations of the Wisconsin Academic Standards. Because the new tests measure the complex skills aligned to college and career readiness, scores for the majority of students show they are not yet proficient. But students aren't doing worse—it's just that the bar is higher. Parents can expect their child's school and teachers to continue working hard to reach this high bar.

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.

Wisconsin's Academic Standards set expectations and goals for the knowledge and skills needed for student success. Local educators and stakeholders in Wisconsin's schools decide how the standards are to be met and tailor instruction to the individual needs of students in their classrooms.

Students will have the opportunity to take practice tests to ensure they understand test basics and how the tests will be administered. No online testing is given without first showing students how to navigate the testing environment.

How should parents interpret score reports?

In Wisconsin, students and their families receive Individual Performance Reports (IPRs) with their exam results. Each assessment has an interpretive guide that explains in detail the scoring and reporting process. More information about assessment data and results can be found by visiting dpi.wi.gov/assessment.

A student's summative assessment IPR on a standardized test is only a snapshot of their overall performance. It can help track progress from year to year and pinpoint areas where a student might need additional assistance or where strengths lie. Many other measures such as classroom work must be considered when looking at academic performance or making any educational decisions about an individual student.

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 are schools held accountable?

In the 2011-12 school year, Wisconsin schools adopted a comprehensive accountability index. The index uses multiple measures—including state assessment scores—to score schools and districts and classify them along a rating continuum. Report card scores are based on performance in four priority areas:

- Student Achievement: reflects proficiency in ELA and mathematics on state assessments
- Student Growth: shows year-to-year academic growth in ELA and mathematics
- Closing Gaps: measures how much schools are improving the performance of student groups that have achievement gaps in reading, mathematics and on-time graduation.
- On-Track and Postsecondary Readiness: indicates the success of students remaining on-track to graduation, achieving educational milestones and readiness for college and career, regardless of their postsecondary pathway

In addition to the above priority areas, schools and districts are also held accountable for three Student Engagement Indicators:

- Absenteeism: measures chronic absenteeism, which is defined as individual students who attend school 84% or less of the time
- Dropouts: measures the proportion of students who leave school prior to graduation
- Test Participation: measures the rate of student participation in state and federal required assessments

The accountability index results (the index score and rating) are reported publicly and available online: dpi.wi.gov/accountability/report-cards. Parents can view any School Report Card or District Report Cards from the drop-down menu.

Where can parents access data on school performance?

A wide variety of school and district data are publicly reported online for parents, community members and the general public to review. Wisconsin's educational data portal WISEdash is home to a number of dashboards displaying multiple years of data on school enrollment, student performance, teacher-to-student staff ratios and more. Parents are encouraged to explore and use the WISEdash Public Portal: wisedash.dpi.wi.gov.

How does Wisconsin ensure students have highly effective teachers and schools?

An educator effectiveness system for Wisconsin teachers and principals was signed into law on April 2, 2012. The Wisconsin Educator Effectiveness System is a performance-based evaluation system designed to improve the education of all students in the state by supporting the guided, individualized and self-determined professional growth of the state's educators. Educators are held accountable for the continual improvement of instructional and leadership practices as well as improved student outcomes.



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.

Your child's school and district leaders should include parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration and respect. For additional details about the district's assessment plan, contact your child's school/district. Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- How many district-wide assessments will my child take this school year and where can I access/view the district 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?

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction (DPI) should also 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 call DPI at (608) 267-1072 or visit: dpi.wi.gov/osa-oea. Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- How many state assessments will my child take this school year and where can I access/view the state assessment calendar?
- 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 DPI and your school district 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

- Tell your children that Wisconsin is preparing each and every student to be college- and career-ready, so there will be new tests they will have to take.
- 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.
- With older children, explain that the 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.
- Be sure to also tell your older child that because the 11th grade assessment, The ACT+WorkKeys, is the required state test, every student in Wisconsin is expected to take both The ACT and WorkKeys to inform their career- and college-readiness.
- Review the testing calendars, for both state and district assessments, 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.
- Make sure your child has a comfortable place for studying and is prepared mentally and physically for a test.
- Review test results with your child and his or her teacher.

Staying informed and involved

- Become familiar with the Wisconsin Academic Standards, visit: dpi.wi.gov/standards
- Learn more about the Forward Exam and other statewide assessments, visit: dpi.wi.gov/assessment
- 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

- Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction website: dpi.wi.gov
- WISEdash Public Portal: wisedash.dpi.wi.gov