



PARENTS' GUIDE TO ASSESSMENTS IN WYOMING

In spring 2014, students in Wyoming in grades 3-8 took assessments aligned to Wyoming Content and Performance Standards, which were adopted in 2012. These 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. Students will take the following assessments:

- **Grades 3-8: Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students (PAWS)**
- **Grades 9-10: ACT Aspire**
- **Grade 11: ACT Plus Writing**

THE 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.

The summative assessments 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 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

The assessments for English language arts (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 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 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.

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.



What Parents Can Expect

The assessments are designed to measure the more rigorous expectations of the state standards. To this end, 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?

Schools are evaluated on several measures of student performance and growth. They receive one of the following overall performance levels:

- Exceeding Expectations
- Meeting Expectations
- Partially Meeting Expectations
- Not Meeting Expectations

How are students and teachers held accountable?

Even if a student does not meet proficiency levels, there should be no negative consequences such as holding him or her back a year. Instead, parents can work with the school to develop an improvement plan tailored to the specific student's needs.





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.

Wyoming 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 Wyoming Department of Education, (307) 777-7675. 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 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 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 Wyoming Department of Education to determine if Wyoming'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 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 tests with your children. Make sure they feel comfortable and understand why they are taking a test.
- 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.
- 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 Wyoming's standards, visit: edu.wyoming.gov/in-the-classroom/student-assessments
- 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 Wyoming Department of Education: edu.wyoming.gov