



PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW ASSESSMENTS IN GEORGIA

The revised Georgia Standards of Excellence (GSE) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics have been in place since 2014. The Georgia Milestones Assessment System in English language arts (ELA), mathematics and other subjects was first administered to students in the 2014-15 school year.

Students take End-of-Grade (EOG) assessments in grades 3-8. High school students (grades 9-12) take the End-of-Course (EOC) measures at the end of designated courses.

The new assessments gauge how well students are mastering the new 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 INCLUDES:

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



What is different about the new assessments?

The new assessments 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.
- Computer-based assessments are standard and will eventually replace pencil and paper tests. 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 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 representative of those found on the new assessments.

EXAMPLE OF A 3RD GRADE MATH QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

Hector is studying his multiplication facts through the product of 10×10 .

Part A

Hector says that any multiple of 6 can be divided into 3 equal groups. Is Hector correct? Explain your answer using words, symbols, or pictures.

Part B

Hector finds the product of 4 and 7 by solving the expression $14 + 14$. Explain how $14 + 14$ can be used to find the product of 4 and 7.

EXAMPLE OF A 6TH GRADE ELA QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

Read the passage “Kayaking for Fun and Sport.”

1. Give three details from the passage to explain and support how kayaking became a sport and recreational activity. Answer with complete sentences and use correct punctuation and grammar.
2. Write a narrative in which a kayaker meets a person in a canoe and the two compare their watercrafts. Use details from the text to support your answer and use correct punctuation and grammar.



EXAMPLE OF AN 11TH GRADE ENGLISH QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

Read an excerpt from the novel “Pride and Prejudice” by Jane Austen and answer the following:

11. Write a paragraph in which you describe, in detail, the tone of the excerpt, using specific examples to support your description. Be sure to discuss any shifts or differences in tone throughout the excerpt as well as the purpose that is served by the style and use of the language.

Use details from the text to support your answer. Answer with complete sentences, and use correct punctuation and grammar.

Answer:

What Parents Can Expect

The Georgia Milestones Assessment System is designed to measure the new, more rigorous expectations of the state content standards. Because the tests measure complex skills, which are different from the skills measured by previous state tests, scores on this new assessment system 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.

How should parents interpret Score Reports?

Students are not compared to each other but are instead measured against the content standards for each grade level. Their achievement in each content area is classified into four performance levels. These performance levels are focused on measuring how students are progressing, instead of simply reporting test scores.

The four performance levels are: Beginning Learners, Developing Learners, Proficient Learners and Distinguished Learners. Having four performance levels, rather than three as with Georgia's previous assessments, helps teachers better pinpoint how students are doing, which in turn gives students more opportunities to succeed.



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 students, schools, and teachers held accountable?

Georgia Milestones Assessment System provides students, teachers and other stakeholders with important information about how well students are learning. Parents, the public, and policy makers, including local school districts and boards of education, can use test results as an indicator of the quality of education in Georgia. As such, the Georgia Milestones Assessment System is a key component of the state's accountability system: the College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI).

In light of the new assessments, Georgia is working to revise the CCRPI. This performance index, along with new school accountability procedures, will be used to specify the ways students who do not meet proficiency levels will be held accountable. Parents can work with the school to develop an improvement plan tailored to the specific student's needs.

Since 2015 was the first year Georgia Milestones Assessments were administered, the CCRPI will not be used right away to assess schools. In the meantime, each school system has a dedicated accountability specialist to provide support.

The new plan will also articulate teacher accountability measures, ensuring that teacher effectiveness ratings are measured against student progress throughout the 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.

The Georgia Department of Education and your local school district should include parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration and respect. For additional details about the state's assessment and accountability system, please contact your school district and/or call the Department at (404) 656-2800. Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- How many assessments does 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 Georgia Department of Education to determine if Georgia'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 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 child. Make sure he or she feels comfortable and understands why the test is important.
- 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 both 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 Georgia standards, visit: georgiastandards.org/Pages/parents.aspx
- Learn more about Georgia Milestones, visit: gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/Georgia-Milestones-Assessment-System.aspx
- Read all comments written by the teachers 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 teachers to identify opportunities for tutoring, after-school clubs or other resources.
- Remember that 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 teachers 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 Georgia Department of Education (GaDOE) web site: gadoe.org
- Visit the GaDOE Testing/Assessment web site: testing.gadoe.org.