In November 2010, Alabama adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) along with selected Alabama standards. The combined standards are known as the College- and Career-Ready Standards (CCRS). The new standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn in English language arts and mathematics as they progress through grades K-12.

In the 2013-14 school year, Alabama will begin rolling out new assessments aligned to the CCRS. The new assessments are being used to gauge how well students are mastering the standards and, ultimately, how ready students are for college and further career education and training.

WHAT ARE THE COLLEGE- AND CAREER-READY STANDARDS?

The College- and Career-Ready Standards are designed to enhance and improve student learning by providing greater clarity and rigor than previous standards. They are more relevant to the real world, giving young people the knowledge and skills they need for college and career success. They are also robust, ensuring a future U.S. workforce that can compete in the global economy.

The new standards emphasize fewer topics and stress not only procedural skills, but also conceptual and critical thinking. The CCRS build knowledge from grade to grade, enabling students to master important concepts before moving on to others.

The standards are not a curriculum. Decisions about curriculum, tools, materials, and textbooks are left to local districts and schools that know their students best.

The Common Core Standards were developed through a state-led initiative, spearheaded by governors and school superintendents, in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, college faculty, parents, and education experts. They build on the excellent foundation laid across all states, and have been internationally benchmarked to ensure rigor on par with top-performing nations.

To date, more than 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core.

In 2011, Alabama began implementing the CCRS changes in each district, school, and classroom. To prepare educators, Alabama has implemented various professional development activities. The Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards website was created to help educators better understand the standards and provide high-quality resources and instructional materials to implement the new standards. The Alabama Insight online curriculum tool has been provided to each district, allowing educators to explore and map the standards.

THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:
- Overview of new assessments that measure student proficiency against more rigorous standards
- Overview of accountability for students and schools
- Additional resources for parents
CCRS-Aligned Assessments

WHY NEW ASSESSMENTS?

Teachers and principals talk a lot about assessments used to measure students’ academic achievement. This document highlights the end-of-year summative assessments that judge student progress toward mastering state standards and 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 students’ ability to memorize facts, rather than their critical thinking and knowledge application skills.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT THE NEW SUMMATIVE 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.

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<th>Types of assessments</th>
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<td><strong>Classroom-based:</strong> Individual tests given by teachers as needed throughout the year to assess knowledge and skills in specific areas</td>
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<td><strong>Interim:</strong> The same test repeated at set intervals to measure student growth over time</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Summative:</strong> End-of-year assessments administered by the state to measure student performance against a common set of standards</td>
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**English language arts 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

- During the next few years, assessments will provide results more quickly and in an increasingly readable and easy-to-understand format, most likely online. Parents can use this information to better communicate with teachers and school administrators about their child’s progress, and teachers can use it to better tailor instruction to the child’s needs.

- Computer-based assessments will eventually replace pencil and paper tests (exceptions will be made for schools that do not yet have the technology). 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.

What Parents Can Expect

This is a new set of standards and assessments with a new way of scoring. Therefore, it is not possible to directly compare new scores with old ones.

The new assessments measure deeper knowledge and skills deemed particularly important for students’ futures, including problem-solving, writing, and critical thinking.

Because the standards are more rigorous, student achievement scores may initially be lower.

A dip should not necessarily be interpreted as a decline in student learning or in educator performance. Educators expect the short-term decline to improve as teachers and students become more familiar with the standards and better equipped to meet the challenges they present.
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 schools and students held accountable?

Once the new assessments are implemented in 2013-14, the Alabama Department of Education will revise its accountability plan. The plan, along with new school accountability procedures, will also specify the ways schools that do not meet proficiency levels will be held accountable.

In the immediate future, even if a student does not meet proficiency levels, there should be no negative consequences. Parents can work with the school to develop an improvement plan tailored to the specific student’s needs.

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.

TAKE ACTION:

Parents need to pay close attention to the new accountability system put in place so they can better advocate for their children. Parents’ collective voice is critical to ensure that testing is implemented well and with enough resources to ensure success. Alabama should include parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration, and respect. If you would like additional details about how students, teachers, and schools will be held accountable or more information on assessments in general, please call the Alabama State Department of Education, Office of Communication at 334-242-9950 or by email at comm@alsde.edu. Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- What will happen if my child does not meet proficiency on the new assessments?
- How will teacher evaluations be affected if students don’t meet proficiency levels?
- How will school ratings change based on results of the new assessments?

Below is the list of policies and practices that National PTA supports. Check with the Department of Education to determine if Alabama’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.
- Policy alternatives to social promotion and grade retention must be established.
- The 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 opposes federal legislation and/or regulations that mandate standardized testing or would lead to such testing, as well as federal policies that mandate comparisons of states, school districts, or individual schools and student retention based on a single test or sole criterion and the practice of social promotion.
Preparing and supporting your child

Discuss the new tests with your child. Make sure he or she is not afraid or anxious going into the new tests.

With an older child, explain that the new assessments were created to ensure he or she is on track to succeed after graduation and to identify any issues early enough to give more support where it is needed.

Explain to your child that the tests will initially be more challenging. Tell your child you have high expectations and that you are there to help every step of the way.

Review test results with your child, taking time to discuss areas of strength and areas where there is room for improvement. Bring the teacher into the discussion as needed.

Provide a quiet, comfortable place for studying at home and make sure your child gets a good night’s sleep before a test.

Staying informed and involved

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 any concerns.

Monitor your child’s progress. 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.

Understand that a single test score does not represent all that your child can or cannot do. It is a snapshot only. Assessment scores are useful but should not be the only factor in determining a child’s academic growth.

Meet with your child’s teacher as often as possible to discuss your child’s progress. Ask for activities to do at home to help your child prepare for tests and to improve your child’s proficiency in skills called for in the CCRS.

Additional Resources

For a more detailed look at what CCSS mean at each grade level, visit: www.pta.org/parentsguide

For more information on implementation of the CCRS in Alabama, visit: www.alsde.edu