



PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW TESTS IN OHIO

In spring 2016, students in Ohio will take Ohio State Tests matched to Ohio's Learning Standards. The new tests will measure how well students are mastering the standards—and ultimately how ready they are for the next grade and for college and careers after graduation. This document addresses the summative, end-of-year state tests for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. These were developed with the help of Ohio educators.

WHY NEW TESTS?

Teachers and principals talk a lot about tests, sometimes calling them “assessments.” Teachers use these tests to measure students’ academic achievement. This document highlights Ohio’s end-of-year summative tests, which judge (1) student progress toward mastering state learning standards and (2) program and school effectiveness. For all of the tests used, see the box at the right.

New end-of-year and end-of-course tests will address longstanding concerns that parents, educators and employers have had about current state tests—namely that they measure a child’s ability to memorize facts, rather than measuring the child’s skills to think critically and apply knowledge.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT THE NEW TESTS?

The new tests for English language arts and mathematics will help educators to deepen their understanding of student progress from grade to

Types of tests

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

State: Tests administered by the state to measure student performance against a common set of standards

This document addresses summative assessments.

grade, and just as importantly, identify any gaps in progress so they can address them well before students enter college or the workforce.

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 tests?

The new tests for English language arts and mathematics will help 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.

English language arts tests will demonstrate:

- Whether students can read and understand texts that vary in difficulty.
- How well students can combine information from many sources to make a persuasive argument.
- The degree to which students can use context to determine the meaning of words.

Mathematics tests will demonstrate:

- Whether students understand and can use important math ideas, including number sense, algebraic thinking, geometry, and data analysis.
- The degree to which students can use mathematical facts and reasoning skills to solve real-world problems.
- How well students can make mathematical arguments.

Benefits of New Assessments:

- The tests allow students to show their work and explain their reasoning so teachers can better understand what they know and where gaps in learning exist. This allows the teacher to address the specific issues.
- 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 explaining answers—showing what they know and can do.
- The tests do not lend themselves to “teaching to the test.” Since the tests focus on using learned skills, the daily use of these skills in the classroom will serve as the best preparation for the tests.
- Schools will have the choice to offer computer-based tests, pencil and paper tests, or a combination of both.
- The new tests will 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 similar to those found on the new tests.

EXAMPLE OF A 4TH GRADE MATHEMATICS QUESTION

Three classes at Lakeview School are going on a field trip. The table shows the number of people in each class, including the teacher.

They can choose to use buses, vans, and cars.

	Total number of people
Mrs. Ruiz's Class	23
Mr. Yang's Class	25
Mrs. Evans' Class	24



Buses have 20 seats



Vans have 16 seats



Cars have 5 seats

Which three combinations can be used to take all three classes on a field trip?

- 1 bus and 4 vans 1 bus and 8 cars

EXAMPLE OF A 6TH GRADE ELA QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

In the passage, the author developed a strong character named Miyax. Think about Miyax and the details the author used to create the character. The passage ends with Miyax waiting for the black wolf to look at her.

Write an original story to continue where the passage ended. In your story, be sure to use what you have learned about the character Miyax as you tell what happens to her next.

Answer:

EXAMPLE OF A 10TH GRADE ELA QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

Use what you have learned from reading "Daedalus and Icarus" by Ovid and "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph" by Anne Sexton to write an essay that provides an analysis of how Sexton transforms Daedalus and Icarus.

As a starting point, you may want to consider what is emphasized, absent, or different in the two texts, but feel free to develop your own focus for analysis.

Develop your essay by providing textual evidence from both texts. Be sure to follow the conventions of standard English.

Answer:

What Parents Can Expect

The new tests measure the higher expectations of Ohio's Learning Standards. Because the tests measure complex skills, which are different from the skills measured by earlier state tests, scores 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, test performance will also improve. In other states that are giving more rigorous tests, students improved their performance after the first year.

How will schools support students?

Schools have created a variety of models to help students who are struggling with the standards. Remediation and summer courses, teaching adjustments based on in-class test results and pull-out tutoring are just a few support strategies. Parents should work with their teachers and administrators to develop a plan for their child, if needed.

How are school districts and schools held accountable?

The Ohio Department of Education issues annual report cards for schools and districts using an A-F grading scale. The report cards consider many measures of district and school effectiveness, including student learning progress, student performance on state tests, enrollment numbers and graduation rates. Schools and districts will not be penalized or rewarded based on student performance on state tests in 2016.

How are students, teachers and principals held accountable?

In light of the new assessments, Ohio is working to adjust its accountability plan. The plan, in addition to new school accountability procedures, will also define how schools will work with students who do not meet proficiency. To score at the "proficient" or "proficiency" level means that a student shows the skills and knowledge that are expected for a child at their grade level.

In the immediate future, even if a student does not meet proficiency levels, there will 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 their student's needs.

School districts will not use student progress on tests to evaluate teachers and principals in 2016, unless a district and educators enter a formal agreement allowing the district to do so.



Take Action

Parents are their child's best champions. As a parent and your child's first teacher, you should know about the test 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 make sure that testing is done well and with enough resources to ensure success.

Ohio should include parents and teachers in conversations based on trust, cooperation and respect. For additional details about the test and accountability system, please call the Ohio Department of Education, (877) 644-6338, or visit the department's website at education.ohio.gov and search "accountability resources". Here are some questions you may want to ask:

- How many tests does my child take this school year and where can I see the test calendar?
- What will happen if my child does not meet proficiency on the new tests?
- 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 their best?
- How will school grades be affected based on results of the new tests?

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 Ohio Department of Education to determine if Ohio's policies and practices are similar.

- National PTA believes that valid testing does not consist of only a single test score, and that at no time should a single test be considered the sole evidence 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 tests 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 tests 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 make sure there will be regular and clear communication from the school on the tests, 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. Encourage them to do their best, but not become stressed out.
- With older children, explain that the new tests 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 be more challenging at first. Tell your child you know he or she can do well on the tests and 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 Ohio's Learning Standards, visit: education.ohio.gov/Topics/Ohios-Learning-Standards
- 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 the 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 tests in Ohio, visit: education.ohio.gov/Topics/Testing
- For more information on school and district performance in Ohio, visit: reportcard.education.ohio.gov