

Spring 2013 Test Scores Frequently Asked Questions Students/Parents

What has changed about teaching and testing in Oklahoma schools? How does it benefit our community?

- In 2010, Oklahoma made a commitment to raise the educational bar for children. Senate Bill 2033 called for the implementation of college and career ready standards. Oklahoma teachers are changing the way they teach.
- The new standards are more rigorous and call for reading and writing across all subjects. They are written so teachers can help students learn to apply the knowledge taught. In other words, think on their feet, solve problems and develop critical thinking skills.
- These standards represent Oklahoma's agreement to raise expectations for our students. We want our children to be prepared for credit-bearing, college course work, workforce training programs or better jobs after graduation so they can be successful and provide well for their families.
- The goal is for students to be College, Career and Citizen ready when they graduate high school.

What are academic standards?

- The State Board of Education has always adopted academic standards to provide a baseline for what students are expected to know in a subject at each grade level. Local school districts adopt the curricula. That puts teachers in the driver's seat so they can determine how they will teach in the classroom.
- In Oklahoma those academic standards are known as the Oklahoma Academic Standards.

How are the tests different?

- As the new more rigorous academic standards are implemented, more rigorous tests aligned to the standards will follow.
- Revised standards were taught in science starting in 2010-2011. More rigorous standards will be taught in social studies this year and educators complete implementation of the more rigorous English and math standards this year.
- The 5th and 8th grade science and writing tests, as well as the Biology I end-of-instruction test, included more challenging test questions to help prepare students for the more rigorous assessments that will follow full implementation of college and career standards.

- The new assessments incorporate reading and writing across all subject areas.
- We are no longer asking students to memorize facts and figures for multiple choice tests. We are asking them to read two or more paragraphs, write out their answers in short essay form and in some cases defend their answers by showing their work.

Why are some of the student test scores lower?

- We expected the student test scores to be lower because the new standards and assessments are more rigorous.
- We knew that as these new standards were implemented, some scores would go down. Every other state that has adopted more rigorous standards like we have has gone through the same transition. And in each of those cases, their students rose to the challenge. Oklahoma kids will rise to the challenge as well.

Will this happen again next year?

- As we continue to fully implement the college and career ready standards, we expect to see an initial drop in the first round of test scores aligned to those individual subjects.
- The Oklahoma Academic Standards will be fully implemented in the 2014-2015 school year in English and math. The tests aligned to those subjects will be given in 2014-2015.

I understand that the State Department of Education also raised the cut scores on these tests. Is that true? (Cut scores are like the defined range of scores that qualifies student work for As, Bs, etc. on classroom assignments and tests.)

- Yes. For our students to be truly ready for college and career upon graduation our expectations for what is proficient had to increase.
- We used to tell our high school students that a 52 percent on the Biology I end-of-instruction test made them “proficient.” But a 52 percent on a school test is an “F.”
- We’ve made the test more rigorous. The values given to the answers are different so now the test scale score is different.
- Although we know fewer students scored proficient, those that did are very well versed in the subject.

My high school student left for summer break believing he/she scored proficient or above on the Biology I test. When he/she returned to school we learned the score was below proficient. How do I explain this to my child?

- Because cut scores are set after a new assessment is given for the first time

no one knew what the new scores for proficient was during the testing window.

- The process for setting cut scores is well defined, set according to a proper timeline and released this summer.

Why can't cut scores be set before students take tests?

- Most testing experts, strongly recommend setting cut scores after the live administration of a test.
- The most defensible standards setting techniques rely on knowing how many students get each item on the test correct. To have the most accurate information about the difficulty of each item, it is necessary to wait until students actually take the exam at a time when the test counts.
- Upon the advice of our Technical Advisory Committee, the State Department of Education has relied on this method or similar methods for setting cut scores since the state began creating assessments to measure what our children have learned.

If my child scored low on their science or writing tests does it mean they are starting to struggle in school? Does it mean the quality of instruction in the classroom isn't as good as it used to be?

- No. We raised the bar. We asked teachers to teach in a different manner. Then, we asked your child to take a much different, more challenging test.
- With your support, district support, the support of the state educational system and your community, our teachers and students will meet the challenge and test scores will return to normal.

How will the Oklahoma Academic Standards and new assessments help my child?

- Colleges, workforce training programs and the jobs in the marketplace already demand young people leave high school with critical thinking and problem solving skills.
- The need for College, Career and Citizen Ready graduates will grow even more in the future.
- This new way of teaching will help your child be more successful in the future no matter what path in life he or she chooses.

How will these and future test scores affect our school's A-F Report Card?

- The test scores in writing and science from spring 2013 will be reflected on school and district A-F Report Cards.
- The State Department of Education will include an asterisk next to the writing, science and Biology I test scores and a footnote on the report cards explaining

these are scores from new tests and should not be compared to last year's test scores.

What can local communities and businesses do to help?

- First and foremost, provide full support to your child's teacher by partnering with him or her to learn what you can do with your child outside of school to contribute to the learning process.
- Talk with the teachers, administrators and support personnel in your child's school to see how you can help contribute to the overall success of the school.
- Help educate the civic groups, religious organizations and other local groups you belong to help their memberships understand what needs exist for improving student achievement in your local schools. Plans can then be developed for meeting those needs.

How is the State Department of Education supporting teachers?

- We have numerous professional development opportunities for teachers including:
 - The REAC³H Network, an instructional team that delivers professional development to classroom teachers and school administrators in regional trainings throughout the state.
 - Sixty REAC³H Coaches who provide literacy training to teachers in their classrooms.
 - The PD on Your Plan program. When launched this will provide virtual professional development teachers can access during their planning period. This means instructional time will not be taken away from students in the classroom.
 - OKMath/OKSci program modeled after Leadership Oklahoma. This program creates leaders who can identify challenges and create solutions for math and science educators. They also can serve as a support system during implementation of the Oklahoma Academic Standards.
 - Convenings of English, math and science teachers who work to determine the needs of teachers for implementation of the more rigorous standards and develop resources and tools to address those needs.
 - A partnership with the National Math and Science Initiative (NMSI) project that increases access to Advanced Placement courses for students and provides training and resources in AP coursework to teachers.
 - The school improvement program that helps our most struggling schools.