

FACT SHEET

Changes to State Testing in Oklahoma – 2017



In 2016, Oklahoma adopted more comprehensive academic standards, which required new, more complex assessments to measure them. The new assessments were given to students in spring 2017, and test results will be released in late fall 2017.

Union Public Schools fully supports Oklahoma's new standards, as they are designed to help students become more creative thinkers and problem-solvers, rather than simply memorize information. The new tests more accurately measure a student's academic progress and readiness for college and career when compared with students across the nation.

New Standards = New Tests

Last year marked the first year schools implemented new standards in math and English/language arts academic standards. These expectations are designed to help students become more creative thinkers and problem-solvers rather than simply memorizing information.

The change in standards also required a change in testing. The new tests are designed to more accurately measure a student's academic progress and readiness for higher education and the workforce.

Test Scoring Changes

The alignment of the tests to national performance levels means the state expects to see a decrease in the number of students scoring at the two highest performance levels – “satisfactory” and “advanced.” The projected drop in scores doesn't mean students are learning less; Oklahoma has significantly raised the bar to make sure all students are well prepared for college and career.

National Comparisons

Oklahoma has benchmarked its test score performance levels to enable national comparisons. At the high school level, students will take the national ACT or SAT in addition to a state science test. For lower grades, this has been accomplished by using the performance levels of the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), which tests a sample of students in fourth and eighth grades. Historically, NAEP tests in math and reading are taken by a sample of students every other year.

Education leaders undoubtedly want our students to score well in national comparisons and are working toward that goal. Despite the expected drop in scores, the last math and reading NAEP scores from 2015 showed Oklahoma's state average is at or near the regional and national averages in most categories.

Why did Oklahoma academic standards change?

We want our kids to be great strategic thinkers, problem-solvers and innovators of tomorrow. Oklahoma's previous standardized tests were not reflecting where our instruction needs to focus in order to prepare our students to compete globally for the upcoming changes in the workforce. Oklahoma teachers and educators set the new standards that give a true “apples-to-apples” comparison of where our children match up with the rest of the nation's youth.

Why are the test scores different this year?

This year is a complete “reset” and new scores should not be compared to previous results. Students in grades 3rd through 8th last year took new tests that are fundamentally different from years past. Parents will receive results from the spring 2017 exams in November. The assessments measure more complex standards, and the performance level expectations were also raised and redefined.

What are the next steps?

Schools have been preparing for these changes and have been working to improve instruction in innovative ways. The new assessments are now aligned with national college entrance exams like the ACT or SAT. Information gained from the assessments allows teachers to identify areas of focus for continued improvements in instruction. Highlighting gaps in learning earlier will allow educators to better prepare our students for high-skilled jobs and innovative careers of the future.

Key Points to Remember

- 2017 will be a transitional year, with test results that are not comparable with those from previous years. These scores will set the baseline for future years.
- State test scores are only part of the data school leaders and teachers use in assessing student progress and identifying academic strengths, weaknesses and opportunities.
- It’s important not to let test scores overshadow the worth of other educational experiences and opportunities that have deep value for students. Research shows a well-rounded education in the arts and extracurricular activities including leadership programs, clubs, etc., can improve student engagement, boost attendance and impact student achievement.
- Not everything that matters is measured in a state test. In fact, employers stress the importance of “soft skills” and traits not measured in state-mandated tests: creative thinking, effective communication, the ability to be a team player, strong work ethic, flexibility and resourcefulness.