

Ohio's State Tests: District FAQs

This document answers questions from teachers, parents and the community about the 2014-2015 results of Ohio's State Tests.

Why are there new state tests?

State tests are critical for measuring student learning and ensuring that every Ohio student receives a high-quality education. The results from state tests provide the public with much-needed information about how all students are performing. Student test scores are the foundation of Ohio school and district report cards, which are designed to show parents, taxpayers and school leaders how well our students are performing. State tests are one way we identify schools and districts that need additional support and recognize those that have done a great job helping all students learn.

What subjects and grades were tested in the 2014-2015 school year?

- **Grades 3-8** Mathematics
- **Grades 4-8** English language arts
- **Grades 4 and 6** Social studies
- **Grades 5 and 8** Science
- **High School** Classes of 2018 and beyond – English language arts I and II; algebra I, geometry or integrated mathematics I and II; biology (or physical science for class of 2018 only); and American history, American government.

Third-graders took the Ohio Achievement Assessments in reading, and high school sophomores, juniors and seniors took the Ohio Graduation Tests.

What's different about the new tests?

In addition to subject knowledge, the new tests measure complex, real-world skills such as critical thinking, problem solving and writing that are given increased emphasis in Ohio's Learning Standards. Last year's tests included questions that required students to interact with objects, respond to multiple parts of a question, solve problems and explain their answers. The 2014-2015 school year was the first for computer-based tests. Districts and schools had the option to give the tests on computers, in paper format or a combination of both. Because the tests measure students partly on more complex skills, scores for some students may look lower than in previous years.

Why are the scores lower than the previous school year?

Lower test scores do not necessarily mean that our schools are performing worse or that our students are learning less. The lower test scores are a reflection of the higher standards Ohio adopted to make sure that all students are successful after high school. As with any change, our teachers and students need time to get used to the new standards and tests. What's important to remember is that the results represent a starting point our teachers and parents can use to measure progress toward college and career readiness.

How will Ohio use the test results?

- **Will these scores impact student promotion?**
Under state law, schools and districts may not use test results during the 2014-2015, 2015-2016 and 2016-2017 school years to grant or deny credit to a student or to promote or deny a student promotion to a higher grade level, except in the case of the Third Grade Reading Guarantee and graduation requirements.
- **Will these scores impact teacher evaluations?**
A state provision called safe harbor gives schools, teachers and students more time to adjust to the new state tests. In most cases, there no longer will be consequences tied to the results of the state tests given in the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years. Additionally, teachers and principals will not use value-added ratings from state tests for the 2014-2015 and 2015-2016 school years as part of their evaluations or when making decisions regarding dismissal, retention, tenure or compensation unless the district and teachers agree to use the data.

- **Will these scores impact school funding?**

No.

What will teachers do with the results?

The focus of teachers is to help all students succeed. These scores are one of many factors that provide feedback to help teachers better meet the needs of the students in their classrooms.

What will schools do with the results?

This information is important for making sure that schools are providing all students with a quality education. These test results will help districts improve instruction.

What should parents do with these results?

Parents are essential to their children's success. They should review the results and work with their children's teachers to identify strategies to improve their progress in learning. For example, tutoring or after-school programs may be available to help a child practice specific skills. In addition, parents can support learning at home by focusing on areas of difficulty. Parents should encourage their children to do their best and reassure them that state test scores are only one indicator of progress.

How do parental refusals for their children to take state tests impact our district's scores?

These new tests are important for measuring how students are doing because they reflect the nature of instruction in schools. Districts receive a score of zero for each student who does not take a state test. Districts need information on all their students to fully inform teachers, parents, our community and the state about student performance.

Why did it take so long to release the score reports?

This year there is a one-time delay in communicating results due to the transition to new state tests in English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies. Ohio will release score results for the 2015-2016 state tests in June 2016.

How is Ohio keeping student data safe?

Protecting student privacy and data is a top priority. Ohio has one of the most stringent student-data privacy protection laws in the country. Ohio Department of Education procedures for protecting the privacy of individual student educational records exceed the requirements of the federal Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act. Ohio is one of only three states, including New Hampshire and Louisiana that do not collect student names as part of their K-12 student data systems. Ohio law prohibits the reporting of a student's name, address and social security number to the State Board of Education or the Ohio Department of Education. The Ohio Department of Education also requires that test vendors follow all state and federal laws to protect student data.

What are the changes for the 2015-2016 state tests?

In the 2015-2016 school year, the Ohio Department of Education is developing new tests in mathematics and English language arts with the assistance of Ohio educators. To build these new tests, the department is using its existing contract with the American Institutes for Research (AIR), a well-known test vendor. AIR currently provides Ohio's science and social studies tests.

The new English language arts and math tests will be:

- Shorter than those given last school year;
- Given during one period of time, known as a testing window. Schools have a 20-day period to schedule all state tests; schools select the specific days that each student will take tests during this period; and
- High schools will give end-of-course tests at the end of the first semester. Elementary schools will give the grade 3 English language arts test Nov. 30-Dec. 11. All other tests will occur during the second half of the school year, close to the end.