

FAQ

State Assessment

What statewide tests are students asked to take?

PAWS: Students in grades 3 through 8 take the statewide Proficiency Assessments for Wyoming Students (PAWS) in reading and math. Students in grades 4 and 8 also take the science portion of the PAWS test.

SAWS: Students in grades 3, 5, and 7 take the Student Assessment of Writing Skills (SAWS), which is used to measure a student's writing skills.

ACT Suite: Students in grades 9, 10, and 11 take EXPLORE, PLAN, and ACT, respectively. These standardized tests are indicators of college readiness and student achievement. Students in grade 11 also participate in the ACT Writing test.

How are these tests used?

PAWS results are used to evaluate school performance. Schools rated by performance levels gain an understanding of the school's strengths and weaknesses according to these tests. Districts use their own methods to directly evaluate individual students.

Parents receive a report on the child's performance on the statewide test. The report outlines the child's performance level in each area tested.

PAWS scores have no direct effect on student grades.

Why are the tests changing?

In 2012, the State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards. Every time the state adopts new standards, the statewide tests must be modified to measure the new standards. The state develops new questions and defines a new grading scale.

Defining the Terminology

Assessment

Assessments or tests indicate how well students are learning certain subjects. The state uses certain tests to indicate the strengths and weaknesses of schools.

Cut Scores

Cut scores define the score ranges associated with each of the four performance levels (advanced, proficient, basic, below basic) in each grade. Similar to how a 90 percent (cut score) defines an A (performance level).

Proficiency

Proficiency is a measure of how thoroughly a student grasps the material and is able to demonstrate that knowledge on the test.

Proficiency Rates

Proficiency rates are the percent of students within a school who score proficient and advanced on the test.

Performance Levels

Performance levels are associated with score ranges on the test. All tested students receive a scale score as well as one of four performance level designations (below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced).

Please share this document with friends, neighbors, and interested parties.

FAQ State Assessment (cont'd)

What's different about the 2014 test results?

Since the 2012 standards in literacy and mathematics established new expectations for students, the 2014 PAWS established an entirely new baseline for student performance. Consistent with experiences of other states, we observed lower proficiency rates than we have seen in the past. This doesn't mean that students know less than 2013 and earlier, or that schools are doing an ineffective job educating their students. Instead, the test itself reflects the new expectations we now have for Wyoming students.

A period of adjustment is expected over the short term as everyone involved in education adjusts to the new standards. Over time, more and more students will achieve the standards, and proficiency rates will increase as the schools and districts decide how to work the new standards into their classrooms.

What's different about what is on the tests?

The spring 2014 PAWS changes were only on the reading and math portions of the test. Questions were redesigned to allow students to demonstrate a working knowledge of the material. For example, students were required to read and contrast more than one text passage at a time, and in math, topics that were formerly addressed in the upper grades are now being tested in lower grades. These changes were consistent with the shifts students should see in classrooms as their teachers adjust their lessons to reflect the new standards. There are no changes in content for the science portion of PAWS or any of the ACT tests at this time. Since the SAWS is a new test, it was developed from the beginning to address the new standards.

Who decides what is on the test?

The Wyoming Department of Education (WDE) works with a major testing company, Educational Testing Services (ETS), to craft the PAWS and SAWS. In this process, the WDE decides the content on each test to ensure the questions accurately measure Wyoming standards. Wyoming teachers are involved each year, reviewing and providing feedback on potential test questions each summer. ACT Inc., creates the ACT suite which includes the ACT, PLAN, and EXPLORE tests. Wyoming does not develop or have input in the content of these tests.