

Higher Standards, Stronger Assessments

Alabama schools are using the new ACT Aspire test to measure whether students are being well prepared for life after high school. This overview addresses typical questions about the new assessment and how it measures student progress.

Alabama's Standards: Higher Expectations

In 2010, the Alabama State Board of Education adopted the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards for math and English language arts. These standards, which are based on the Common Core State Standards, are a set of academic expectations for what Alabama students are expected to learn in math and English each school year.

Here is an example of a 4th grade English standard from Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards compared to an example from Alabama's previous standards from 2007. The state's enhanced standards are clearer and allow Alabama teachers to spend more time diving deeper into the text for improved comprehension than the previous standards allowed. The state's College and Career Ready Standards also require students to show they have a deeper understanding of what they are learning. In other words, gone are the days of only memorizing facts just for a test. Now they have to explain ideas, too.

Alabama College and Career Ready Standards	Alabama 2007 English Standards
<p>Describe in depth a character, setting, or event in a story or drama, drawing on specific details in the text (e.g., a character's thoughts, words, or actions). [RL.4.3]</p> <p>Explain major differences among poems, drama, and prose, and refer to the structural elements of poems (e.g., verse, rhythm, meter) and drama (e.g., casts of characters, settings, descriptions, dialogue, stage directions) when writing or speaking about a text. [RL.4.5]</p> <p>Refer to details and examples in a text when explaining what the text says explicitly and when drawing inferences from the text. [RI.4.1]</p> <p>Determine the main idea of a text and explain how it is supported by key details; summarize the text. [RI.4.2]</p> <p>Explain how an author uses reasons and evidence to support particular points in a text. [RI.4.8]</p>	<p>Identify literary elements and devices, including characters, important details, and similes, in fourth-grade recreational reading materials and details in fourth-grade informational reading materials.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identifying main idea• Identifying author's purpose

Alabama's Standards: Real Learning for Real Life

Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards put in place clear, consistent expectations for students and teachers, and build students' knowledge and skills to take with them long after graduation – *whether starting college or a career.*

By adopting the Alabama College and Career Ready Standards, Alabama is expecting more of our students than memorizing answers and repeating them on a test. Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards emphasize *real-life* critical thinking and applied knowledge skills that today's students will need to succeed in the *real world.*

Higher Standards, Stronger Assessments

Alabama schools began administering the ACT Aspire test in late April 2014. The ACT Aspire replaces the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT). The state offers its assessments in the closing weeks of the school year to ensure student learning continues as long as possible before testing students on their progress. Schools allocate up to two days for their students to take the test. The following chart demonstrates which tests are administered in each grade:

GRADE/COURSE	TEST ADMINISTERED
3 through 8	ACT Aspire – End-of-year test to measure student progress in math, English and other subjects
8	ACT Explore* – To be replaced with 8th grade ACT Aspire
10	ACT Plan* – To be replaced with 10th grade ACT Aspire
English 10 & Algebra 1	ACT QualityCore – End of course tests for specific subjects
11	ACT Plus Writing – ACT College Entrance Exam
12	ACT Workkeys – Job skills assessments coming Spring 2015

* With the transition into ACT Aspire, the last administration of ACT Explore and ACT Plan for Grades 8 and 10 will be October 2014.

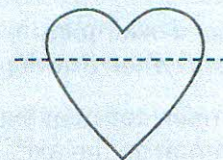
Alabama's Standards: More than Just a Score

Alabama's ACT Aspire test is significantly different from the state's previous test for grades 3-8, the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT). Previously Alabama primarily asked multiple-choice, bubble-in-the-answer questions. **The ACT Aspire requires students to think critically, show their work, and explain their answers through short essays and other methods.** This will better measure whether students are progressing towards the goal of preparing all students for college and a career.

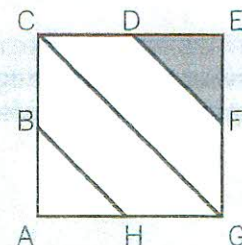
Since Alabama's ACT Aspire test is more demanding of students, there is a good chance that results in the first years may be lower than what parents are used to seeing. However, the drop in scores is only temporary and will provide teachers with a better benchmark for where students need more focus. It will also provide parents with honest feedback about how prepared their child is for college or a career after graduation, and the ACT Aspire aligns with the ACT exam that all 11th graders in Alabama take for free as a college entrance exam.

Sample ACT Aspire Questions

Explain what a line of symmetry is.
Explain why the dashed line drawn in the figure below is NOT a line of symmetry for the figure.



In square ACEG shown below, B, D, F, and H are the midpoints of AC, CE, EG, and AG, respectively. A student thinks that the area of $\triangle DEF$, shown shaded, is $\frac{1}{4}$ the area of square ACEG. Explain why the student is NOT correct.



I AM AN Alabama Parent

What do Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards Mean for My Child?

Raising the bar and expecting more is hard work, particularly for students and teachers. New standards mean new ways of teaching and learning in classrooms, and ultimately harder tests. To stay the course with higher standards and expectations, Alabamians need to be more vocal about better-preparing students for the future.

? What are Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards / Common Core?

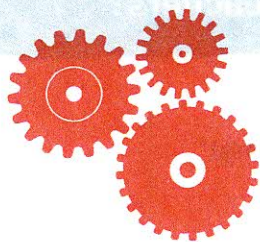
Every student a graduate; every graduate prepared for real life



- The Alabama College and Career Ready Standards (CCRS), which are based on the Common Core State Standards, are a **set of academic standards for math and English** being taught in K-12 classrooms across Alabama.
- Academic standards are **goals for what students should know** by the end of each school year. Alabama's standards focus on helping our students gain a **deep understanding of the concepts** being taught and how they apply to real life.
- Alabama's State Board of Education has the only authority on what standards (*goals*) our state adopts. Local school systems still develop their own curricula (*how it's taught*) and choose their own textbooks to teach from every day. Individual teachers still develop their own lesson plans.

? What does this mean for my child?

Real learning for real life

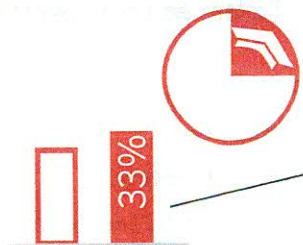


With the CCRS, Alabama students rely less on memorization and filling out worksheets. Instead, they **focus on critical-thinking and problem-solving skills** that will benefit them long after they finish their academic career.

Alabama adopted the CCRS after conversations with officials from Alabama's colleges and employers about what our schools need to do in order to prepare all of our kids for success in their next phase in life – *whether they are going on to college or starting a career.*

? Why was a change necessary?

Setting higher and clearer goals for a successful future



Our state's academic standards have not kept up with the changes in technology and the real-life skills students need to be successful. As a result:

One in four students that enter Alabama high schools do not graduate.¹

33% of Alabama graduates are required to take high school-level classes their freshman year in college to reteach concepts they were supposed to learn in K-12 schools. This percentage is higher than the national average.²

1 <http://www.wsfa.com/story/22563032/alabama-department-of-education-releases-2011-2012-graduation-rate-statistics>
2 http://blog.al.com/wire/2013/10/are_alabamas_high_school_gradu.html

? How are Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards / Common Core Different From Previous Courses of Study?

Students must do more than retain information long enough to regurgitate it on an exam



The Alabama College and Career Ready Standards (CCRS) **expect more of students** than previous standards, and they will help ensure students are prepared for real life. University of Alabama professor Jeremy Zelkowski, a former high-school math teacher, has extensively studied Alabama's new math standards and says that the new standards will help make Alabama schools **more competitive** internationally. According to Zelkowski, Alabama's old standards only asked students to have a basic understanding of what was being taught, while the CCRS require students to *do more than just memorize material long enough for their next exam*.³

3 http://www.decatordaily.com/news/local/article_c63e5392-28bc-11e3-9458-0019bb30f31a.html

? What Can I do to Support My Child?

Our students are up for the challenge, but parental involvement is critical to helping a child achieve more. Things you can do at home include:

- ☐ Set aside time every day when your child can concentrate on reading, writing, and math.
- ☐ Ask your child questions about their schoolwork and encourage them to explain how they got to an answer. Remember that students are learning to be problem solvers and critical thinkers.
- ☐ Asking questions is a great way to help them learn.
- ☐ Talk to your child's teacher and ask how you can help at home.

? What Questions Should I ask my Child's Math and English Teachers?

- ☐ What do the CCRS mean for your class?
- ☐ What kinds of changes can I expect to see in the types of work my child will be doing?
- ☐ How have your lesson plans changed because of CCRS?
- ☐ Will CCRS be used in other areas in school?

How can I help? *Learn. Connect. Advocate.*

Join the effort to make CCRS success locally.

Speak-Up about how setting high expectations will help your business and community.

Visit www.alabamaGRIT.org.

Sign the "Got GRIT" pledge located at alabamaGRIT.org.

Like Alabama GRIT on Facebook and share the resources posted on that page.

Follow @AlabamaGRIT on Twitter and post tweets with #realllearning.

Tour a classroom in your community.

Talk to teachers in your community.

Organize an CCRS Informational Meeting.

Spread the Truth about what is really taking place inside Alabama classrooms.



ALABAMA COLLEGE AND CAREER READY

Frequently Asked Questions

1 What are Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards?

Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards are a list of academic goals for what school students need to know in their math and English classes each school year.

2 I hear one person say Common Core and another one say Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards. Is there a difference?

The Common Core State Standards are a list of shared academic goals developed by educators. The initiative to set shared academic goals was launched by the nation's governors and school superintendents. Forty-five states and schools managed by the United States Department of Defense currently use a version of the Common Core State Standards. Our College and Career Ready Standards are Alabama's version of Common Core.

3 Why did Alabama start using standards modeled after the Common Core State Standards?

Every few years, the Alabama State Board of Education appoints a committee made up of Alabama parents and teachers to review and update its list of academic goals for public schools. In 2009, this committee was tasked with deciding whether the Common Core State Standards for math and English would work in Alabama. After careful review, this committee overwhelmingly recommended adopting a version of Common Core updated to meet the state's specific needs.

4 Why do we need common academic standards?

There are several reasons why common academic standards are important. First, they help make sure a diploma from Alabama means as much as one from another state. Secondly, they help make sure a student doesn't fall behind if he or she moves. And, third, having common standards lets teachers share resources more easily.

5 How are Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards different from curriculum?

Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards are a list of academic goals for what students need to know in their math and English classes each school year. A curriculum is made up of the lesson plans, materials, and methods for instruction created by your child's teachers to help their students meet the academic goals our schools have set for students through the adoption of higher standards.¹

6 What books are required under the Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards?

The only required reading materials used within Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards are the Declaration of Independence, the U.S. Constitution, and Abraham Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address.²

1 Thomas Rains Jr., "Common Core complaints are misdirected," AL.com, March 21, 2014, http://www.al.com/opinion/index.ssf/2014/03/complaints_in_alabama_about_sc.html (last accessed May 7, 2014).

2 Ross Wiener, The Common Core's Unsung Benefit: It Teaches Kids to Be Good Citizens, The Atlantic, March 5, 2014, <http://www.theatlantic.com/education/archive/2014/03/the-common-cores-unsung-benefit-it-teaches-kids-to-be-good-citizens/284209/> (last accessed March 31, 2014).

7 Should I be concerned whether or not my child's textbook says it is "Common Core aligned"?

No. As a parent you can rest assured knowing that your local school board members and teachers choose the textbooks, workbooks, novels, and other materials that are best suited for your child. If you object to content in one of your child's books, you should discuss it with your child's school.

8 My child's math homework is different from how I was taught. Will my kids still learn math facts like the times tables and basic concepts to solve problems like I did?

Yes, your child still must learn math facts like multiplication tables.³ One benefit of Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards is that instead of simply memorizing math facts, students now learn why these numbers hold the value they do and what relationship they hold to other math concepts.

9 Under the state's English language arts standards, will my child still read classic literature?

Yes, the classics are still being read in every public school in Alabama. One great thing about shared standards is that one English teacher may decide to have his students read John Steinbeck's *The Grapes of Wrath*, while another may have her students read *To Kill A Mockingbird* to teach the same standards.⁴

10 Do my child's teachers have a say in what is being taught inside their classrooms?

Yes, it is up to local teachers to write lesson plans, select teaching strategies, and determine what curriculum is taught inside their classrooms.⁵

11 Do my local school board and superintendent have a say in the direction of our local schools?

Yes, along with your child's teachers, your local school board and superintendent are responsible for determining what books and other materials are used in your community.

12 Will my child have to take any standardized tests?

Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards do not require any tests. Alabama students in grades 3-12 will continue to take a standardized test each year; however, under Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards, Alabama's public schools will spend less time testing and more time teaching. Beginning in 2014, students will only spend a few hours a year taking standardized tests instead of five days.⁶

3 2013 Revised Alabama Course of Study: Mathematics, Alabama State Department of Education, 2013, <https://docs.alsde.edu/documents/54/2013%20Revised%20Alabama%20Mathematics%20Course%20of%20Study.pdf>.

4 2013 Revised Alabama English Language Arts Course of Study: English Language Literacy for College and Career Readiness

5 Thomas Rains Jr., "Common Core complaints are misdirected," AL.com, March 21, 2014, http://www.al.com/opinion/index.ssf/2014/03/complaints_in_alabama_about_sc.html (last accessed March 21, 2014).

6 Assessment Update, Elementary/Secondary Education Work Session, Alabama State Board of Education, March 13, 2014.