

# Tennessee's Academic Standards in Math and English



## Toolkit for Conversations

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# Tennessee's Academic Standards in Math and English

By the end of the decade, nearly two-thirds of new jobs will require education after high school. However, ACT has found that less than one-fifth of Tennessee students graduate high school fully prepared to continue their education. In today's economy, competition for jobs comes not just from across town but from around the world. Our state has to make sure students are ready for life after high school.

Standards determine the knowledge and skills that students are expected to learn in each grade and subject. Tennessee has raised the bar in the classroom by adopting higher expectations in math and English language arts.

- With these standards, learning focuses on real-world skills like critical thinking and problem solving, the kinds of skills needed for success in college or career training and the workforce.
- Students are no longer just memorizing the right answer; they are learning how to find the right answer, how to prove that it is the right answer, and how to use that answer in a meaningful way.
- The standards progress with the students, building on the foundation in the early grades to create a ladder for climbing to college and career readiness. For example, math classes in elementary and middle school teach the concepts to prepare students for Algebra I.

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 more challenging school work and assessments.

# Frequently Asked Questions About Tennessee's Standards

## **What are Standards?**

Academic standards are nothing new. They are created by educators, higher education experts, and state officials for use in K-12 public schools to specify what students should learn in each subject for each grade. Here in question-and-answer format is an explanation of academic standards in Tennessee.

## **What are Tennessee's State Standards for English Language Arts and Mathematics?**

Tennessee's state standards are a higher set of expectations for learning in math and English. Teachers are using these standards to teach students real-world skills: how to reason, how to solve problems alone and with others, and how to read literature and nonfiction more deeply and with greater comprehension. Students are no longer just memorizing the right answer; they are learning how to find the right answer and how to prove that it is correct. Tennessee's standards set high expectations for all students so all students – no matter their background or their ZIP code – will graduate ready for the next step.

## **Why did Tennessee adopt new standards?**

Tennessee's old, rock-bottom standards left many students poorly prepared for college and career. Students were passing our state exams, but they were failing when compared to students in other states. According to ACT, less than 20 percent of Tennessee students have graduated high school ready to move on to freshman-level college work in math, English, reading, and science. When students are not ready for postsecondary study, they and their parents pay a price. By the end of the decade, nearly two-thirds of job openings in Tennessee will require postsecondary education.

## **How do students benefit from the higher standards?**

Tennessee's new standards ensure that our students are held to the same high expectations as students across the country. Students are learning to think critically and to communicate clearly by pointing to evidence for their answers and conclusions. These higher standards call for students to develop a deeper understanding of materials rather than basic memorization and test-taking skills.

When we expect more, students achieve more. Tennessee used to rank at the bottom of states for academic achievement. Thanks to higher standards in math and English and other improvements in education, Tennessee became the fastest-improving state for academic achievement in 2013 and moved up in national rankings.

### **What is the connection between standards and curriculum in Tennessee?**

Standards are not the same as curriculum. While academic standards set the destination, teachers and school leaders decide which lesson plans and textbooks to use to reach the goal. Tennessee educators have received significant training to use the standards in their classrooms, with more than 50,000 educators having received state training developed and led by Tennesseans.

# Talking Points on Tennessee's Standards

1. Standards are clear goals for what students should know at each grade level.
2. Tennessee's current standards are a higher set of expectations for learning in math and English.
3. Though the standards identify the skills students need at each grade level, local school districts choose textbooks and resources for teaching and learning as they have always done.
4. The standards were created to set higher expectations to ensure every student graduates high school prepared for success in the workforce and college.
5. The standards focus on real learning in the classroom, instead of rote memorization or test-taking skills. The goal is less memorizing and more understanding.
6. The standards emphasize communicating clearly, critical thinking, and problem solving, which are necessary skills in today's workforce and education beyond high school.
7. The standards are fewer in number than Tennessee's previous standards. They focus on key concepts at each grade level and allow teachers to spend more time going deeper into the information.
8. The standards set high expectations for ALL students, not just high-achieving ones.
9. There are new assessments that will better measure what students are learning in class by asking students to apply what they have learned versus just picking from multiple choice answers

# Sample Email to Legislators

Dear Representative/Senator \_\_\_\_\_:

As the superintendent of \_\_\_\_\_, I have been actively involved in the implementation of new education initiatives in our state for the past seven years. Starting with the Tennessee Diploma Project in 2008, there have been annual changes made in our schools. Some of these changes have come through the State Board of Education and some have come through the General Assembly. Tennessee has made significant progress in the quality of education that students receive, and districts have shouldered the process of implementation with a keen understanding that we are continuing on a path of improvement in student learning. Not only have teachers continually answered the call during times of transition, but our students have done so as well.

Now I am asking that my teachers, administrators, and students be afforded the opportunity of stability that is just on the horizon. Specifically, I am asking that **no legislative action be taken during the 2015 legislative session to change our academic standards**. We will be administering an assessment that aligns to our current standards in the spring of 2016. Teachers have been working hard and preparing for this assessment. It would be a huge blow to the morale of educators if the General Assembly passes legislation that puts Tennessee on a path to change standards once again or that alters the timeline for the new assessment.

I am also asking that you take no legislative action that would preempt the current standards review process that is underway. There has been unprecedented participation in the review process, especially by Tennessee teachers. Please let their input be valued and move forward with efforts to improve and enhance our current standards and truly make them our own, while also giving educators and students the stability they desire and deserve.

Tennessee has received national attention for the historic gains our students have made. Please do not derail this momentum with another change that could disrupt the learning process for students and teachers in classrooms across our state.'

Thank you for your leadership and commitment to Tennessee's students.

Very Sincerely,

# Sample Social Media on

Hashtags to follow:

- #ExpectMoreTN
- #TNCore
- #TNedu
- #TNedNews

Sample Tweets:

- It's not just about high standards for students. It's about high standards for instruction through teachers & administrators #ExpectMoreTN
- TN Teacher of the Year explains high standards are student-focused. #TNleg please listen to educators like @NBCTchr <http://tnne.ws/1BPOc4I>
- If you support high standards for students, make your voice heard by participating in the standards review process. <http://bit.ly/StandardsReviewTN>
- Memorization is a great skill we still have in our classrooms. Critical thinking is the application of that memorized content. #TNStandards
- Been wondering what to call Tennessee's new assessment? The answer is TNReady. More info here at its new web home: <http://1.usa.gov/1xK8U7E>
- College may not be every student's destiny, but it should be every student's option: <http://bit.ly/1s20fXa>
- Higher standards help ALL students - even high achievers - read and think deeply. A view inside a class: <http://n.pr/1zmwmp6>



# Tennessee's Standards Review Process

Aiming to increase student achievement in Tennessee, the state adopted higher academic standards in 2010. Over the past four years the Tennessee Department of Education has provided professional learning, guidance, and support to districts on the implementation of more rigorous English language arts and math standards. The high expectations associated with Tennessee's State Standards aim to push students toward greater levels of achievement.

In October 2014, Governor Haslam announced a public review process of Tennessee's State Standards for English Language Arts and Math. Academic standards in Tennessee are generally reviewed every six years. As a result of current discussion on the standards, Governor Haslam expressed his desire to provide an opportunity for all stakeholders, particularly teachers, to share feedback on the standards after four years of implementation. Governor Haslam emphasized that the goal of this process is to maintain high standards for Tennessee students stating, "This discussion is about making sure we have the best possible standards as we continue to push ahead on the historic progress we're making in academic achievement." This review process is outlined below:

- **Online review process:** Through an [online portal](#), all Tennesseans have the opportunity to review Tennessee's State Standards for English Language Arts and Math. Any Tennessean can provide feedback on what they like or dislike about a specific standard and offer suggestions on what they would like to see changed. In its first ten days, the portal received more than 15,000 comments. The portal is slated to close in spring 2015, but the type and amount of responses will dictate when this portal will ultimately close for responses.
- **Southern Regional Education Board:** The Tennessee State Board of Education has partnered with the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), a nonprofit, nonpartisan third party, to collect and compile comments from the portal once it has closed. SREB will share these comments with Review and Development Committees and Advisory Teams, appointed by the State Board of Education.
- **Review and Development Committees and Advisory Teams:** Governor Haslam called on the State Board of Education to appoint two committees, an English Language Arts Standards Review & Development Committee and a Math Standards Review & Development Committee, as well as three, grade-level specific advisory teams for each of the committees. The committees consist of six K-12 educators and two representatives from Tennessee higher education institutions.

- **During the summer and fall of 2015**, the six advisory teams will review the data from the portal and make their best recommendations for changes, deletions and overall modifications to the standards in math and English language arts to the larger Standards Review and Development Committees for their respective subject areas. The Governor’s vision is that by the close of 2015 the two committees will aggregate the recommendations made by the grade specific teams and present their overall recommendations to the State Board of Education.

# TN Ready

In November 2014 the state of Tennessee completed the process to replace the state's current TCAP (Tennessee Comprehensive Assessment Program) assessments in English language arts (ELA) and math. The new measurements of learning for ELA and math will be called Tennessee Ready (TNReady). These ELA and math assessments, administered by Measurement Inc., were selected through a fair, thorough and transparent process established by the General Assembly and administered by the state's Central Procurement Office. The winning proposal for our future assessments not only received the highest rating from a content and technical standpoint but did so at the lowest cost of any of the finalists.

TNReady will be administered beginning in the 2015-16 school year and will assess our state standards in ELA and math.

## Additional Information

- **By Tennessee, For Tennessee:** Tennessee educators – both at the K-12 and higher education levels - were significantly involved in the selection process and chose an assessment that is both fully aligned to the state's academic standards but also adaptable to future improvements. Tennessee will make decisions about item selection, test length and composition, and scoring. In the future, Tennessee will decide on changes to the test based on changes to standards, and Tennesseans will be engaged in item development and review.
- **Higher Expectations and Critical Thinking:** TNReady will expand beyond just multiple choice questions to include: writing that requires students to cite text evidence at all grade levels; questions that measure math fluency without a calculator; and questions that ask students to show their work in math with partial credit available.
- **Resources for Parents and Teachers:** Online tools will be available for schools and teachers to develop practice tests that can provide students, teachers, and parents with valuable and immediate feedback. These resources will be available before the end of the 2014-15 school year.
- **Training:** The Tennessee Department of Education will provide training for educators across the state during the summer of 2015.
- **Test Administration Scoring:** TNReady will have two parts. The first portion, which will replace the state's current comprehensive writing assessment, will require extended written responses in ELA and math and will be administered in February/March. The second portion will include selected responses, such as multiple choice and drag-and-drop items, and will be administered in April/May.
- **Technology:** TNReady will be administered online and available for use on multiple devices with minimal bandwidth. As most states move their tests for all grade levels online, we must ensure Tennessee students do not fall behind their peers in other states. However, all districts will have the option of administering paper-pencil exams.

# Talking Points on Assessment

1. Assessments measure student progress from year to year to ensure students learn what is expected of them at each grade level.
2. Tennessee's new standards are expecting more, and to be sure students are achieving more, we must measure their learning with an assessment that tests the skills the new standards emphasize.
3. Tennessee currently uses TCAP to gauge student progress. In 2015-16, a new assessment aligned with Tennessee's standards will be used to more accurately measure student growth in English and math.
4. A high-quality assessment engages students in ways that deliver meaningful results about their reading and writing skills, math skills, and reasoning skills.
5. Assessment results help Tennessee track and maintain its position as the fastest-improving state in the nation for academic achievement.
6. Assessment results provide teachers with information they can use to shape their teaching and ensure that students get the help they need to reach learning goals.
7. Reliable assessments give teachers and parents a way to gauge where their students stand on the path to college and career at each year, not just at the end of high school.
8. Student progress shown through assessment results assures taxpayers that their money is being used effectively.
9. Because a multiple-choice test cannot fully measure reasoning abilities, Tennessee's next assessment for English and math should allow students to show that they know both the right answer and why it is correct.
10. An effective assessment provides students a fair chance to demonstrate what they have learned and gives educators, parents, community members, and policymakers a consistent way to compare performance between schools and school districts. The information helps our students stay on track for college and career success.