

# Higher Standards, Stronger Assessments

Alabama schools are using the new ACT Aspire test to measure whether their students are being well prepared for life after high school. This overview addresses some typical questions about the new assessment and how it measures student progress under Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards.

## 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 include the Common Core State Standards, are a set of academic goals for what Alabama students are expected to know in their math and English classes 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 on the standards, 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 school. In other words, gone are the days of only memorizing facts just for a test. Now they have to explain ideas, too.

<i>Alabama College and Career Ready Standards</i>	<i>Alabama 2007 English Standards</i>
<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"><li>• Identifying main idea</li><li>• Identifying author's purpose</li></ul>

## Alabama's Standards: Real Learning for Real Life

Alabama's College and Career Ready Standards were adopted to put in place clear, consistent expectations for students and teachers, and to build students' knowledge and skills that they can 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. Instead, 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 tomorrow.

# Higher Standards, Stronger Assessments

Alabama schools began administering the ACT Aspire test in late April 2014. The Aspire exam 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. State schools can allocate up to two days for all of their students to take the test. The following chart demonstrates which tests are administered in each grade:

GRADE/COURSE	TEST ADMINISTERED
<b>3 through 8</b>	<b>ACT Aspire</b> – End-of-year exam to measure student progress in math, English and other subjects
<b>8</b>	<b>ACT Explore*</b> – To be replaced with 8th grade ACT Aspire
<b>10</b>	<b>ACT Plan*</b> – To be replaced with 10th grade ACT Aspire
<b>English 10 &amp; Algebra 1</b>	<b>ACT QualityCore</b> – End of course exams for specific subjects
<b>11</b>	<b>ACT Plus Writing</b> – ACT College Entrance Exam
<b>12</b>	<b>ACT Workkeys</b> – 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 only asked multiple-choice, bubble-in-the-answer questions. **Aspire requires students to think critically, show their work, and explain their answers through short essays and other methods.** This will better measure whether the state's students are progressing towards the state's 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 Aspire scores align 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.

