



North Dakota State Assessments (NDSA)

Understanding the North Dakota State Assessments (NDSA)

Teaching and learning in North Dakota are assessed through the North Dakota State Assessments. The tests are aligned to the learning standards and instructional objectives in the North Dakota Content Standards. The Content Standards are an organized framework that lays out what skills and knowledge are required at each grade level for a student to attain proficiency in a subject area.

State and federal law require the use of statewide assessments in reading and mathematics. There are a number of purposes for the assessments that are given. They help identify areas where students are underperforming and can help plan for appropriate remedial instruction. They help educators and administrators recognize areas where additional instruction is needed.

These assessments also monitor school's progress at educating all students to the standards in the curriculum. The assessments in reading and mathematics are a key component of determining Adequate Yearly Progress on a school by school basis. One of the goals of the No Child Left Behind Act is that 100% of students are reaching levels of proficiency by the year 2014.

In North Dakota, students begin taking statewide assessments in grade 3. On a yearly basis through grade 8 students will be assessed in Reading and Mathematics. In grades 4 and 8 students take an additional NDSA assessment in Science. In grade 11 students will again be assessed by the North Dakota State Assessments in Reading, Mathematics and Science

Starting in 2013, North Dakota will be adopting the Common Core Standards. These are curricular standards laid out for Mathematics and English Language Arts. They are being adopted by more than 40 states across the nation; the standards seek to ensure college and career readiness. With the transition to the Common Core Standards there will be shifts in the assessment program in the state.

While students will continue taking statewide assessments in Reading and Mathematics, the next generation of assessments will be specifically aligned to the Common Core Standards in these subjects. Along with the development of the Common Core Standards there is development of an assessment tool.

Format of the North Dakota State Assessments (NDSA)

For students in grades 3-8 and 11 who take the North Dakota State Assessments (NDSAs) the question formats are multiple-choice, constructed response and extended response. The assessments are given during a three week testing window that begins in late October and ends mid-November. Schools will determine the exact times and dates of the assessments.

The tests may be given over multiple-days and students are allowed the time they need to complete the assessments. Students with disabilities that require accommodations based on an Individualized Education Plan (IEP) or who have a Section 504 will receive the accommodations they require. The assessments are only given in English; there are no bilingual or translated versions of the tests.

Because the test is given in the fall, not far from the beginning of the school year, it is in fact testing that a student mastered the content from the previous year. If students are not proficient in the prior year content plans for remedial instruction can be made.

Taking the North Dakota State Assessments (NDSA)

As a criterion-referenced assessment, the North Dakota State Assessments (NDSAs) are linked to the material, the criteria, as it is covered in the curricular Content Standards. The Content Standards provides a broad overview of each subject area, and then covers specific skills within those areas. The general skill sets and knowledge areas that students will be assessed in are:

Reading/Language Arts – the research process, the reading process, the writing process, and the understanding of language usage and conventions. Within these areas is vocabulary development, understanding literary and informational texts, being able to evaluate, analyze, interpret and relate ideas and knowledge and communicate it effectively.

Mathematics – numbers and operations, geometry and spatial sense, data analysis, statistics and probability, measurement, and algebraic functions and patterns. All these materials are covered in the curriculum throughout the grade span however the skills taught and tested are grade-level appropriate.

Science – unifying concepts (change), scientific inquiry (tools, processes), physical science, life science, earth and space science, science and technology/other areas, and the history and nature of science. Students will have had some exposure with each of these concepts at the 4th, 8th and 11th grade levels and the test questions will be based upon the materials taught in the previous year.

Students will receive two scores on the assessment. There are scaled scores which represent the number of correct answer factored by the difficulty level of the correct answers based on the total number of questions.

Those scores translate into proficiency levels, of which there are three: Advanced, Proficient and Partially Proficient. There are “cut scores” which represents the numerical scale score where one proficiency level moves to the next.

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