

WI
Δ
ED.
9/4:
S 72/
1999

How well is your child learning?

The State Superintendent's Parent Advisory Council wants you to know about Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards and the Wisconsin State Assessment System.

What Are Academic Standards?

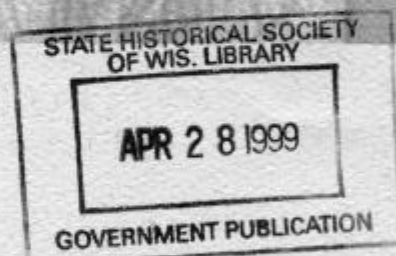


As a parent, you want to feel confident your child is learning everything he or she needs to know to successfully move from kindergarten through high school. You expect your child to receive a good, solid education so as an adult he or she will thrive in and contribute to the workplace, community, and the world. Parents, educators, and business people from across Wisconsin share your expectations and, as a result, have developed Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards.

The Model Academic Standards describe the skills your child should have and the things he or she should know by the end of grades four (4), eight (8), and twelve (12). Each subject area is divided into content

standards (what students should know and be able to do) and performance standards (how students will show they meet the content standards). Proficiency standards (how well students have learned the content) have been established for the five subjects covered in statewide tests. Those subjects are mathematics, science, social studies, reading, and language arts.

It is important for all Wisconsin parents to understand that these standards encourage a higher level of learning and academic achievement from all students. But, most importantly, these standards will help to better prepare your child for the ever-changing world he or she will live and work in as an adult.



**WISCONSIN DEPARTMENT
OF PUBLIC INSTRUCTION**

How Your Child's Learning Progress Is Measured



How the Academic Standards Work in Your Child's Classroom

Your school board may either adopt Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards or develop and adopt its own standards.

Teaching, learning, and testing should all be connected to academic standards. Each day your child's teacher refers to a plan, called a curriculum, that outlines what a child should learn day-to-day in the classroom. With each new school year, your child deepens his or her knowledge of a subject by learning new concepts that build upon what was learned the past year.

A curriculum may be designed in different ways to help children with diverse needs meet the academic standards. How well your child has learned a subject's content will be measured against these standards. For example, a fourth-grade student's score on the statewide mathematics test will be reported in terms of the math proficiency standards established for learning up to that grade level.

As a partner in your child's education, you may want more specific information about the connection between the academic standards, the curriculum, and tests in your school district. Ask your child's teachers or school principal for further information. Remember that the stronger the connection is at all grade levels, the better prepared your child will be for meeting these standards.

In Wisconsin, statewide examinations are adopted and administered by the Department of Public Instruction (DPI) in five subject areas within the Model Academic Standards:

- reading
- language arts
- mathematics
- science
- social studies

Unless exempt, your child will take state tests, or locally developed tests, at his or her school, and the results will be reported back to you through the school. Check with your school principal about students who may be exempt.

The examination scores will show how your child is doing in the tested areas. It is important to note that not all academic standards will be covered in each of the tested subjects; but a recent study conducted by DPI shows that current test questions measure a majority of the standards.

If you have questions about test scores or the tests, be sure to talk to your child's teacher, guidance counselor, school principal, or district assessment coordinator.

STATEWIDE ASSESSMENT: WISCONSIN STUDENT ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

W I
Δ
ED.
9/4;
S 72/
1999

Wisconsin Reading Comprehension Test

This test is taken by third-grade students over a three-week period each spring. The test is given in three sessions and is not timed, although most children finish each session in about an hour. The purpose is to identify your child's reading level as compared to statewide proficiency standards for third-grade children. The test results are important for several reasons.

- Parents are made aware of their children's reading comprehension skills. Scores are reported at one of four proficiency levels: advanced, proficient, basic, or minimal performance.
- If the child does not score at or above the basic level, parents and teachers can decide whether remedial reading instruction is needed.
- School districts can judge the effectiveness of their primary reading programs and change instructional strategies, if needed.

The Knowledge and Concepts Examinations

These examinations are given to students statewide in the fourth, eighth, and tenth grades each year. The tests are designed to measure your child's achievement in five subject areas — mathematics, science, social studies, reading, and language arts. It is important to note that your child will be tested on some of the knowledge and skills in Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards. All of the content contained in those standards is not covered by these tests. Schools report test results to parents in the following ways:

NORM-REFERENCED SCORES.

These scores compare children with each other. For example, an eighth-grade student who scores in the 75th percentile in science has done as well as or better than 75% of the eighth-graders nationally who took the test at the same time of year.

PROFICIENCY LEVELS.

These levels indicate how well children have learned the knowledge and skills tested when compared to a set standard. In Wisconsin, these standards are called proficiency standards. Each proficiency level includes a range of scores. When looking at your child's proficiency level, keep in mind there are four proficiency levels:

- **Advanced:** Distinguished achievement. Student shows an in-depth understanding of academic knowledge and skills tested.
- **Proficient:** Student is competent in the important academic knowledge and skills tested.
- **Basic:** Student is somewhat competent in the academic knowledge and skills tested.
- **Minimal Performance:** Student shows limited achievement in the academic knowledge and skills tested.

Testing and Grade Advancement

In June of 1998, the Wisconsin Legislature passed a pupil assessment statute regarding grade promotion, which is scheduled to go into effect on July 1, 2002. The statute requires fourth and eighth grade students to score at the *basic level or above* in each subject area of the WSAS examination in order to be promoted to the fifth and

ninth grades. If a school board administers its own fourth and eighth grade examination, instead of the state test, students must achieve a *passing score* on the examination, as determined by the school board, in order to be promoted. For those students who do not take the fourth and eighth grade examination, the school board shall develop alternative criteria for evaluating students. The fourth and eighth grade students must satisfy the alternative criteria in order to be promoted.

If you have further questions regarding this new Wisconsin statute, contact your local school board or your child's principal.

High School Graduation Test

There is a new high school graduation requirement. Beginning in school year 2002-2003, all public high school students have to pass a graduation test. The state graduation test will be based on the Wisconsin Model Academic Standards. Local school boards may require the state test or adopt another examination. Students will be given at least four chances to pass the graduation test adopted by their local school board. Parents may excuse their child from this new testing requirement, and school boards must establish alternative criteria to the graduation test for excused students. The graduation test requirement applies to students who are in grade 8 in school year 1998-99 and all future classes.

Watch for more information about this new graduation test requirement from your school board and the state. For specific questions, check with your school principal or guidance counselor.

Getting Involved: Ways to Help Your Child Do Better in School

The long-term goal of the Wisconsin Student Assessment System (WSAS) is for all students to show they have mastered the skills and knowledge in the subject areas tested. Since parents will always be their children's most important teacher, it's a good idea to learn more about Wisconsin's testing system, so you can help your students get the most from their education. Special thanks to my Parent Advisory Council for insisting that we develop this brochure.

John T. Benson
State Superintendent



JANUARY 1999

Please note: The information contained in this brochure is accurate at the time of publication. Because some of the issues explained, such as testing and grade advancement, will be up for further discussion in the Wisconsin Legislature, parents should be aware that changes may occur.

► ***Your child will be assessed (tested) on only the content contained in the Model Academic Standards.***

All concepts and skills that your student should know are included in Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards. By state law, school boards were required to adopt these standards, or local standards, by August 1, 1998 for at least mathematics, science, reading, language arts, and social studies. Ask your school board if they have adopted such standards!

► ***The curriculum in your child's school should be designed to meet or exceed the Model Academic Standards.***

Ask if it does. This is especially important if your child will be taking a state-developed high school graduation exam. Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards are new and just completed in 1998. As a result, many schools probably will need time in aligning the curriculum with the new standards. If you have questions regarding the curriculum used in your child's school, contact the school principal. If copies of Wisconsin's Model Academic Standards and your school's curriculum are not already in the public library, request that these documents be made available to the library for lending to your community.

► ***You have the right to review the actual tests taken by your child after testing is completed.***

All school districts have copies of test booklets. Some districts request that scored tests be returned by the testing company so parents and school staff can review the exam. Contact your school principal to review tests.

► ***If your child scores in a lower proficiency level, even in grade 4, you should be concerned.***

A low proficiency score in grade 4 is an early warning that your child may need help to develop necessary knowledge and skills required at that grade level. Talk to your child's teacher to learn what skills and knowledge need additional work. Find out how you can help your child improve his or her skills and study habits.

► ***You can be a real force in motivating your school to help students learn more and test better.***

Review your child's proficiency scores but also examine how well your child's school did compared to other schools, especially those with higher achievement levels that appear demographically similar. Ask your school principal or district administrator for a copy of the School Proficiency Summary, or view it at the DPI website (www.dpi.state.wi.us).

► ***You can be an advocate for your child and school.***

Get involved in school improvement and policy making. Attend your local school board meetings. Volunteer for task forces, committees, and in your child's classroom. Get other parents involved, too. Your presence will help the school become more responsive to involving more families in their children's education.

► ***You can help your child test better and learn confidently.***

Set aside a few minutes each evening for you and your child to review homework. If he or she is having trouble understanding a concept, this review time often can help. Always feel free to talk to your child's teachers about other learning strategies that you can use at home.

For more information...

For more information about academic standards, tests and examinations, open enrollment, family-community partnerships with schools, and many other topics, call the Department of Public Instruction toll-free at 1-800-441-4563. Or, visit the DPI website at: <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us> A search page at the DPI website allows you to view your School Proficiency Summary. To do so, go to <http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/oea/kce.html> Click on "test results."

The Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction does not discriminate on the basis of sex, race, religion, age, national origin, ancestry, creed, pregnancy, marital or parental status, sexual orientation or physical, mental, emotional or learning disability.



PRINTED ON RECYCLED PAPER