



Pupil Assessment

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Prepared by

Christa Pugh

Wisconsin Legislative Fiscal Bureau
One East Main, Suite 301
Madison, WI 53703
<http://legis.wisconsin.gov/lfb>

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This paper provides information on testing programs for elementary and secondary school pupils that are administered or coordinated by the Offices of Educational Accountability and Student Assessment within the Department of Public Instruction (DPI), as well as the school and school district accountability reports created based on data from the annual assessments.

The first two sections of this paper provide a brief overview of requirements for assessments under federal law and under state law. The next section discusses the current Wisconsin assessment system. The fourth section describes uses of assessment results, including the accountability reports required under federal and state law, and the final section discusses state and federal funding for assessment initiatives.

Federal Requirements for Testing

Federal law governing pupil assessment was primarily established under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA). The 2002 reauthorization of the act (No Child Left Behind, or NCLB) required every school district to administer annual assessments to all pupils in certain grades and subject areas for the first time. The most recent ESEA reauthorization (the Every Student Succeeds Act of 2015, or ESSA) generally maintains the testing requirements first established by NCLB. The following section describes current testing requirements under federal law.

Under federal law, states are required to test pupils in math and reading or language arts annually in grades 3-8 and at least once during high school. Additionally, states must administer a

science assessment to pupils at least once in grades 3-5, once in grades 6-9, and once in grades 10-12. The assessments must be aligned with challenging academic standards and must provide parents, teachers, and school leaders with individual interpretive, descriptive, and diagnostic reports.

Assessments must include multiple measures of pupil academic achievement, including measures of higher-order thinking skills. Assessments can include portfolios, projects, or other performance tasks, and can be administered through a single summative assessment or through multiple assessments throughout the school year that result in one summative score.

Alternate Assessments. States are required to administer the same assessments to all pupils, with some exceptions. For example, ESSA allows a school district to choose to administer a nationally-recognized high school academic assessment instead of the statewide assessment, if the assessment meets certain requirements and receives state approval.

Additionally, each state is required to provide appropriate accommodations for pupils with disabilities, including alternate assessments for pupils with the most severe disabilities. Alternate assessments for pupils with disabilities must be aligned with the state's academic standards and achievement goals. No more than 1% of the total pupil population taking an assessment in a state in any year can be tested using such an assessment.

Federal law also requires states to make appropriate accommodations for English language learners, including allowing pupils to take assessments in their native language if the school district determines that doing so would achieve more accurate and reliable results. Additionally, English language learners in grades K-12 must take a

single statewide English language proficiency assessment annually.

Assessment Participation. At least 95% of the total number of pupils in tested grades in each state, as well as 95% of the number of pupils in tested grades in each subgroup described above, must participate in assessments each year. ESSA does not prohibit a state from allowing parents or guardians to opt their child out of the assessments; however, the child counts against the 95% participation requirement. Consequences for schools that do not meet the 95% threshold are determined by states and districts.

Academic Standards. Each state is required to submit a plan to the U.S. Department of Education demonstrating that the state has adopted challenging academic content standards, as well as achievement standards that align to the content standards and include at least three levels of achievement. The academic standards must include standards for math, reading or language arts, and science, and may include other subjects as determined by the state. The standards must be aligned with entrance requirements for credit-bearing coursework in the state's public higher education institutions and with the state's career and technical education standards.

In general, the same standards must apply to all public schools and public school pupils in the state. However, states may adopt alternative achievement standards for pupils with the most severe disabilities. The alternative standards must be aligned with the state's academic content standards, and must be adopted through a documented and validated standards-setting process. States must also develop standards for English language proficiency in speaking, listening, reading, and writing.

States cannot be required to submit standards to the U.S. Secretary of Education for review or approval. Additionally, the Secretary is prohibited from mandating, coercing, or otherwise exercising

control over academic standards adopted or implemented by the states.

National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). NAEP, commonly referred to as the Nation's Report Card, is a nationally representative assessment administered by the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) in the U.S. Department of Education. Since 1969, assessments have been administered periodically in reading, mathematics, writing, science, history/geography, or other areas including music, art, computer competence, and civics. The assessments are designed to provide a continuous national survey of educational achievement and trends.

Under NAEP, objective-referenced assessments are administered to representative, randomly selected national and state samples of 4th, 8th, and 12th grade pupils in both public and private schools. The samples of pupils to be tested are selected by NCES to represent the student population of the nation as a whole and of individual states. States and school districts that receive Title I funds are required to participate in NAEP 4th and 8th grade reading and mathematics assessments, if selected, but participation for other subjects and grade levels is voluntary. In 2017, approximately 6,400 fourth and eighth grade public school pupils in Wisconsin participated in a NAEP reading or mathematics assessment.

State Requirements for Testing

State law requires public school districts, district-sponsored charter schools, independent charter schools, and private schools participating in the private school choice programs to administer pupil assessments to pupils in specified subjects and grade levels, in addition to those required under federal law. State law requires assessments to be administered to pupils in 4th grade, 8th grade, and 9th through 11th grades in reading, writing,

mathematics, science, and social studies, in addition to a reading assessment required for pupils in 3rd grade. Choice schools must administer required statewide assessments only to pupils who are attending the school under a choice program, and are not required to administer state assessments if fewer than 20 pupils enrolled in grades 3-12 attend the school under a choice program.

Additionally, public school districts, district-sponsored charter schools, and independent charter schools are required to administer an assessment of reading readiness to pupils in four-year-old kindergarten (K4) through second grade. The assessment must evaluate whether each pupil possesses phonemic awareness and letter sound knowledge. Schools are required to report the results of the assessment to each child's parent, and must provide a pupil who is determined to be at risk of reading difficulty with interventions or remedial reading services.

Academic Standards. Each public school district, independent charter school, and private choice school is required to adopt pupil academic standards in mathematics, science, reading, writing, geography, and history. Each school district is required to notify the parents and guardians of pupils enrolled in the district of the pupil academic standards that will be in effect for each school year prior to the start of the academic year. The notice can be made electronically, including by posting a notice or link on the district's Internet site, and must also be included as an item on the agenda of the first school board meeting of the school year.

Parental Opt-Out. Public, charter, and private choice schools are required to excuse a pupil from taking an assessment required under state law at the request of the pupil's parent or guardian. State law does not address parental opt-out for assessments in grades required only under federal law or for local assessments, but DPI indicates that such a request may be granted at the district or school's discretion. A request to excuse a pupil must be made in writing.

Public Notification. If a school district, independent charter school, or private choice school maintains an Internet site, state law requires the district or school to annually post online information about pupil assessments administered to pupils in the district or school.

Alternative Assessment. Under 2015 Act 55, the State Superintendent was required to request a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education that would allow each school district, charter school, or private choice school to choose from a list of three to five assessments selected by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Value-Added Research Center (VARC). DPI submitted a request for a federal waiver to the U.S. Department of Education on September 29, 2015, which was denied. No action is currently being taken by VARC to identify alternative assessments.

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Under 2015 Act 55, the State Superintendent is prohibited from adopting or approving assessments developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium after 2014-15. The Consortium consists of states that designed assessments to align with the Common Core State Standards. In the 2014-15 academic year, Wisconsin pupils took reading and math assessments designed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, known in the state as the Badger Exam.

Current Wisconsin Assessment Programs

The following section describes the assessments currently administered to Wisconsin pupils to meet the requirements under state and federal law.

Assessment of Reading Readiness. School districts and independent charter schools are required to administer an assessment of reading readiness to pupils in grades K4-2. School districts

and independent charter schools can select their own assessment to administer to meet this requirement. The selected assessment must be appropriate, valid, and reliable, and must evaluate whether a pupil possesses phonemic awareness and letter sound knowledge. Districts may administer a computer adaptive assessment.

Wisconsin Forward Exam. State and federal requirements for pupil assessment in 3rd grade through 8th grade, as well as the social studies requirement for pupils in 10th grade, are met with the Wisconsin Forward exam. Beginning in the 2015-16 school year, the Forward Exam is administered in English language arts and mathematics to pupils in 3rd grade through 8th grade, in science to pupils in 4th and 8th grades, and in social studies in 4th, 8th, and 10th grades.

The Forward Exam is a custom assessment developed, administered, and scored by Data Recognition Corporation. The exam is administered in the spring between late March and early May. The assessment consists of multiple-choice questions, short answer questions, and essays, and is administered online. The test is untimed, but testing for each of the four content areas takes an estimated 90 to 140 minutes. Pupils receive a score in each content area that falls into one of four levels: advanced, proficient, basic, or below basic.

Results from the 2017-18 Forward Exam are shown in Table 1.

ACT Suite. Starting in 2014-15, students in grades 9, 10, and 11 participate in assessments included in the ACT Suite. Students take the ACT Aspire Early High School assessment in the spring of their 9th and 10th grade years. The ACT Aspire assesses student readiness in English, mathematics, reading, science, and writing, and is administered online. The test includes both multiple choice and open-ended questions, and administration requires a total of four hours, 10 minutes.

Students in 11th grade take the ACT Plus Writing and the ACT WorkKeys assessments in the spring. The ACT Plus Writing consists of four multiple-choice tests in English, mathematics, reading, and science, as well as a 40-minute essay test. The ACT WorkKeys is a job skills assessment that measures foundational and soft skills. Both 11th grade assessments are currently administered using paper copies, but may be administered online in the future.

ACT assessments are scored from 1 to 36, except for writing which is scored from 1 to 12. Table 2 shows ACT scores for Wisconsin graduates over the last five years, including composite scores, which are the average of the English, reading, mathematics, and science assessments. The first year in which all graduates participated in the statewide administration of the ACT assessment is 2015-16. Following the statewide ACT implementation, participation increased from 73% of graduates in 2015 to 100% of graduates in 2016.

Alternative Assessments. Wisconsin schools use the ACCESS for ELLs assessment to measure English language proficiency in students from kindergarten to grade 12. The ACCESS is an online assessment that measures students' English listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills in five content areas: social and instructional language, English language arts, mathematics, science, and social studies.

Students with severe limitations in cognitive functioning, in adaptive behavior, or in other academic functioning who are unable to participate in the Forward Exam or ACT assessments may take an alternative assessment developed by the Dynamic Learning Maps Consortium in grades three through 11. The assessment is designed to map a pupil's learning throughout the year, and is administered online, although accommodations such as presenting test questions to a pupil verbally may be provided.

Table 1: 2017-18 Forward Exam Results (Percent of Pupils in Each Proficiency Level)

	Advanced	Proficient	Basic	Below Basic	Not Tested	Student Count
3rd Grade						
English Language Arts	7.3%	32.9%	37.1%	21.6%	1.1%	60,624
Mathematics	11.7	38.8	30.8	17.8	0.9	
4th Grade						
English Language Arts	8.4	36.0	31.6	22.9	1.1	61,699
Mathematics	12.1	33.2	36.4	17.4	0.9	
Science	16.6	34.6	33.5	14.3	1.0	
Social Studies	22.3	31.8	23.9	21.2	0.9	
5th Grade						
English Language Arts	6.9	37.7	33.7	20.5	1.2	62,535
Mathematics	11.2	35.5	28.9	23.4	1.0	
6th Grade						
English Language Arts	10.3	32.9	34.4	21.0	1.4	61,290
Mathematics	6.3	38.2	30.7	23.5	1.3	
7th Grade						
English Language Arts	9.4	35.5	33.0	20.5	1.6	61,230
Mathematics	4.7	34.5	29.3	30.1	1.5	
8th Grade						
English Language Arts	9.4	27.6	37.0	23.7	2.3	61,985
Mathematics	8.0	28.6	34.7	26.6	2.2	
Science	14.7	33.8	32.9	16.3	2.3	
Social Studies	20.3	31.4	24.1	21.9	2.3	
10th Grade						
Social Studies	19.4	26.9	22.4	26.5	4.8	63,302

Table 2: Statewide Average ACT Scores, 2012-13 to 2016-17

	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17
Composite	22.0	22.1	22.1	20.3	20.3
English	21.3	21.4	21.4	19.4	19.4
Reading	22.1	22.2	22.4	20.5	20.4
Mathematics	21.9	21.9	21.9	20.3	20.3
Science	22.2	22.2	22.2	20.5	20.7
Writing	7.3	7.3	7.1	6.1	6.1

Uses of Assessment Results

There are three primary purposes of pupil assessment: (1) to evaluate the quality and level of pupil achievement and indicate what pupils, teachers, schools, districts, and states can do to improve

their performance; (2) to provide accountability information (the relationship between public investment in education and pupil achievement); and (3) to provide information that can be used by teachers and pupils in decisions relating to remediation, program placement, and career paths. Different types of assessments are administered depending on the kind of information sought.

The Wisconsin Forward Exam is an example of a criterion-based assessment, which measures how well pupils have learned specific curricular material by comparing their scores to grade-level expectations. For the Forward Exam, scores are set for each proficiency category, from below basic to advanced, and pupils are placed into these categories based on their performance on the tests. These results can help identify areas of strength or weakness for individual pupils, classrooms, or

schools relative to the state standards.

The ACT is an example of a norm-referenced assessment, which compares pupils taking the test with one another through percentiles or other indicators. Results from this type of exam are used to determine where pupils score in comparison to all other pupils. These results are provided to parents and schools to provide information about pupils' knowledge and skills relative to those of other pupils. Additionally, because scores corresponding with college and career readiness have been identified, the assessment can also be used to identify whether individual pupils or pupils from certain schools or districts meet minimum expectations, as with a criterion-based assessment.

Additionally, the data from assessments are used to create the school district and school accountability reports required under state and federal law. State and federal law regarding accountability reports, as well as information about the reports published most recently by DPI and uses of assessment scores prohibited under state law, are described below.

Federal Law Regarding Accountability Reports. Under ESSA, each state must develop a statewide accountability system. The system must be based on the academic standards and academic assessments adopted by the state, and the same system must be used for all public schools.

The system must include the following indicators: (a) academic achievement, as measured by proficiency on annual assessments; (b) one additional indicator of academic achievement, such as pupil growth; (c) for high schools, a measure of graduation rate; (d) for English language learners, progress towards achieving English language proficiency; and (e) one indicator of school quality and pupil success, such as pupil engagement, educator engagement, post-secondary readiness, or school climate and safety. The system must provide information for all pupils, as well as for pupils in subgroups including pupils from major racial and ethnic groups, economically

disadvantaged pupils, pupils with disabilities, and English language learners. Each indicator must be given substantial weight, and academic indicators must be weighted more heavily. Test participation rates must also be incorporated into the system.

States must use the system to meaningfully differentiate all public schools. For the lowest performing schools, the school district in which the school is located must identify an evidence-based plan to improve the school, with progress monitored by the state.

Additionally, the system must differentiate any school at which any of the above subgroups are underperforming. If a particular subgroup of pupils consistently underperforms, the school must identify an evidence-based plan to improve its performance, with progress monitored by the school district.

Each state must establish long-term and intermediate goals for all pupils and for pupils in each of the above subgroups, including goals for academic achievement as measured by proficiency on annual assessments, high school graduation rates, and percent of English language learners making progress towards English proficiency.

Wisconsin submitted its final ESSA plan on January 11, 2018, and it was approved by the Department of Education on January 16, 2018.

State Law Regarding Accountability Reports. State law requires DPI to publish accountability reports annually by November 30 of each year, except DPI was prohibited under state law from publishing reports based on data from the 2014-15 academic year.

Each report must include the following information:

1. Multiple measures to determine a school's performance or a school district's improvement, including the following, categorized by race or

ethnicity, English language proficiency, disability, and income level:

- a. Pupil achievement in reading and mathematics;
- b. Growth in pupil achievement in reading and mathematics, calculated using a value-added methodology;
- c. Gap closure in pupil achievement in reading and mathematics and, when available, rates of graduation; and
- d. Rates of attendance or of high school graduation.

2. An index system to identify a school's level of performance and a school district's level of achievement that assigns each school or district to one of five performance categories. The five statutory categories, as well as the cut-off scores for each, are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Accountability Report Score Categories

Five stars out of five -- Significantly Exceeds Expectations	83-100
Four stars out of five -- Exceeds Expectations	73-82.9
Three stars out of five -- Meets Expectations	63-72.9
Two stars out of five -- Meets Few Expectations	53-62.9
One star out of five -- Fails to Meet Expectations	0-52.9

3. For a school district and each high school located in the district, all of the following information:

- a. The number and percentage of pupils participating in the early college credit program;
- b. The number and percentage of pupils participating in a youth apprenticeship program;
- c. The number of community service hours provided by pupils;
- d. The number of advanced placement courses offered to and the number of advanced

placement credits earned by pupils; and

- e. The number of pupils earning industry-recognized credentials through a technical education program.

Additionally, when calculating pupil achievement and growth, DPI is required to use a weighting formula that takes into account the percentage of pupils in a school or school district who are economically disadvantaged. Under the formula, pupil growth is weighted more heavily for schools or districts with a greater percentage of economically disadvantaged pupils, while pupil achievement is weighted more heavily for schools or districts with a smaller percentage of economically disadvantaged pupils.

Beginning with the report cards published in 2015-16, DPI is required to prepare report cards for independent charter schools and private schools participating in the private school choice programs. An accountability report is issued for every choice school based on data from choice pupils only. Each choice school can also choose to receive a second accountability report that includes all pupils attending the private school if the school submits data for all pupils at the school to DPI. State law prohibits DPI from including data from virtual charter schools located in a district on the district's accountability report if at least 50% of the school's enrollment attends the school under the open enrollment program.

Each public school, independent charter school, and private choice school must provide a copy of the school's accountability report to the parent to guardian of each pupil enrolled in or attending the school. The school must simultaneously provide a list of the educational options available to children who reside in the pupil's resident school district, including public schools, private choice schools, charter schools, virtual schools, full-time or part-time open enrollment in a non-resident school district, the early college credit program, and options for pupils enrolled in a home-based private educational program.

State law requires the appropriate standing committees of the Senate and Assembly to conduct a review of school and school district accountability reports biennially beginning in the 2017-18 school year.

Accountability Reports Prepared by DPI. The first school accountability reports were published for the 2011-12 school year, and the first school district accountability reports were published for the 2012-13 school year. Accountability reports have been published annually since those years, with the exception of the 2014-15 school year.

The accountability reports include outcomes from the four priority areas required under state law. The reports identify each school or district's score out of 100 in each priority area, and compares the school or district's score to the statewide average.

Additionally the accountability reports include information about performance on two student engagement indicators. The indicators are: (a) absenteeism rate, with a goal of 13% or less; and (b) dropout rate for middle and high schools, with a goal of six percent or less. Schools and districts can meet these goals using either a current year or three-year calculation. A deduction of five points is made from the weighted average student engagement indicator score for each goal that is not met.

Each report card also provides demographic information about the school or district, including enrollment and the percentages of pupils in each race or ethnic group, pupils who have disabilities, economically disadvantaged pupils, and English language learners. The cards also include one- and three-year pupil test participation rates, but that data does not factor into the accountability scores or ratings. A detailed version of each report card is available that shows supplemental data used to calculate outcomes in the four priority areas and the student engagement indicators. To protect pupil privacy, data for groups of fewer than 20 pupils is generally not shown.

The overall accountability score displayed on each report is calculated using the scores from the four priority areas, minus any student engagement indicator deductions. The score places schools and districts into one of the five performance categories required under state law. If a school does not have data necessary to calculate an accountability score, the school receives an alternate accountability rating. These include: (a) schools with fewer than 20 full academic year pupils tested in grades 3-8 and 11; (b) schools without tested grades, such as K-2 schools; (c) schools exclusively serving at-risk pupils; and (d) new schools. Alternative accountability schools must complete a district-supervised self-evaluation and report their findings using a form provided by DPI. Schools use local data and indicators of their choice to measure pupil progress and identify whether performance is improving or declining based on the measures selected.

Table 4 shows the number of schools and districts by performance category and star rating based on the report cards prepared for the 2017-18 school year. Public, independent, and private choice schools are included in the school counts; only public school districts are included in the district count. Accountability reports for each school and district in the state, including charter schools and private choice schools, can be found on DPI's Internet site: <https://apps2.dpi.wi.gov/reportcards/>.

Table 4: 2017-18 Report Card Summary

Accountability Rating	School	
	Schools	Districts
Significantly Exceeds Expectations (*****)	327	49
Exceeds Expectations (****)	768	206
Meets Expectations (***)	671	152
Meets Few Expectations (**)	249	14
Fails to Meet Expectations (*)	95	0
Alternate Accountability Process		
Satisfactory Progress	185	1
Needs Improvement	19	0
Not Rated	175	0

Separately, beginning in 2018-19, DPI will begin publishing information required by the

federal accountability system under ESSA. The data will include outcomes on a 0-100 point scale for each of five indicators included in Wisconsin's ESSA plan (academic achievement, pupil growth, graduation rates, progress in English language proficiency, and chronic absenteeism). The reports will be published annually, and DPI anticipates that scores will be publicly available via a spreadsheet posted to DPI's website. Only public schools are required to be included in the federal accountability system.

Prohibited Uses of Assessment Results. State law prohibits the use of state or federal assessment results as the sole reason to discharge, suspend, or formally discipline a teacher. Assessment results cannot be used as the sole reason for the nonrenewal of a teacher's contract. Additionally, assessment results cannot be used to determine general or categorical aids to school districts.

Funding for Pupil Assessment

Pupil assessment costs are significant. Although federal funding is provided under ESEA to

offset some of the cost of pupil assessments, a significant portion of the cost is borne by the state.

Table 5 provides a breakdown of total funding provided to DPI for pupil assessment programs from 2015-16 to 2018-19. The table identifies costs in three areas:

1. **Printing, scoring, and reporting costs.** This includes payments to vendors for the tests and for scoring services.
2. **Development.** This includes base costs for continual evaluation of standards alignment, scoring, and bias for the assessments.
3. **Program operations costs.** In 2018-19, the Office of Educational Accountability within DPI consists of 20.25 authorized positions, which are directly responsible for assessment-related activities. Federal funds support 16.65 of these positions.
4. **Supplies and services costs.** The supplies and services budget includes items such as data processing, printing, travel, space rental, postage, conferences, and consultant expenses.

Table 5: Expenditures for DPI Pupil Assessment Programs

	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19*	
Printing, Scoring, Reporting, and Development	\$16,792,900	\$13,934,828	\$18,573,255	\$17,444,213	GPR
	2,038,500	3,428,682	3,664,219	3,827,093	FED
Program Operations	266,886	108,579	55,904	405,874	GPR
	1,396,676	1,461,437	1,858,894	1,933,190	FED
Supplies and Services	46,299	30,450	130,373	100,000	GPR
	<u>428,777</u>	<u>698,256</u>	<u>731,247</u>	<u>700,000</u>	FED
Total	\$17,106,085	\$14,073,857	\$18,759,532	\$17,950,087	GPR
	<u>3,863,953</u>	<u>5,588,375</u>	<u>6,254,360</u>	<u>6,460,283</u>	FED
	\$20,970,038	\$19,662,232	\$25,013,892	\$24,410,370	
Permanent Positions (FTE)	3.80	3.60	3.60	3.60	GPR
	15.75	16.15	16.45	16.65	FED
Total	19.55	19.75	20.05	20.25	

*2018-19 figures are budgeted. All other years are actual.
Does not include separate appropriation for PALS assessment.