



STATE OF ALABAMA
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION



Thomas R. Bice
 State Superintendent of Education

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
December 11, 2014

CONTACT: Communication
334-242-9950
comm@alsde.edu

Alabama
 State Board
 of Education

Governor
 Robert Bentley
 President

Al Thompson
 District I

Betty Peters
 District II

Stephanie Bell
 District III

Yvette M.
 Richardson, Ed.D.
 District IV

Ella B. Bell
 District V
 Vice President

Charles E. Elliott, M.D.
 District VI

Jeff Newman
 District VII
 President Pro Tem

Mary Scott Hunter, J.D.
 District VIII

Thomas R. Bice, Ed.D.
 Secretary and
 Executive Officer

ACT ASSESSMENTS ESTABLISH NEW BASELINE FOR STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT
New Scores Show Snapshot of Current Academic Standing

Montgomery, Ala. – For the first time, Alabama is assessing students at a high level, and it is doing it in a way that is providing meaningful information to teachers, parents, and students that will help make sure they are on track to graduate college- and career-ready.

In 2013, the Alabama State Board of Education began working with the nationally recognized ACT company to establish new college- and career- ready benchmark measures. Alabama had a real need to move to higher-level tests that help make sure students graduate ready for life after high school – whether going on to college or straight into a career.

Last spring, students in Grades 3-8 took the first year of new assessments aligned to the [Alabama College- & Career-Ready Standards \(CCRS\)](#), the [ACT Aspire assessment](#), in place of the Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT). Among other things, the ACT Aspire focuses less on multiple-choice questions and more on open-response questions. Additionally, the ACT Aspire provides teachers, parents, and students with meaningful, honest feedback to help make sure students stay on track to graduate from high school college- and career-ready. If students score below the ACT Aspire Readiness Benchmarks, teachers and parents can intervene to help make sure a student gets on track.

Moving to a more rigorous set of standards does come with a challenge. When you raise the bar and change the measurement, there’s going to be an impact. Some interpret the results of the ACT Aspire as a drop in scores. It is not a drop, but rather a shift in measurement.

“These results provide a new baseline for students’ achievement. The results are not comparable to previous assessments as they are more rigorous and challenging, aligned to new standards and expectations for students,” said Dr. Tommy Bice, State Superintendent of Education, [Alabama State Department of Education](#). “Clearly, we must own the areas in which we need improvement as it is our goal to make sure all of Alabama’s students graduate prepared for the world which awaits them after high school. We are proud of educators and students for teaching, learning, and aspiring to meet the challenges of higher academic standards.”

-more-

ACT Assessments Establish New Baseline for Student Achievement
New Scores Show Snapshot of Current Academic Standing

In 2013, only one in five Alabama high school graduates was ready for college based on the ACT College Readiness Benchmarks. In addition, among students who enrolled in college, one in three had to take remedial classes in math, English, or both. Numbers like this present a significant problem. Just four years from now we can expect to see 82% of jobs in the state require some type of postsecondary education, whether that is a four-year degree, a two-year degree, or industry certification.

The ACT Aspire represents a significant change from how student achievement has been defined up to now and will change how student and school performance is reported in the future. Student ability is not suddenly dropping with the shift to the new tests. Instead, the expectation of what students must know and be able to do on state assessments has become more rigorous.

“Previously, the academic expectations for students have been too low, both in Alabama and across the nation. This is the tough medicine we need to take if we’re going to make sure students are really ready to compete for tomorrow’s jobs against people from all over the world,” Bice said. “The good news is, our students and teachers can, and will rise to the occasion. Soon we will see an upward trend in the percentage of students who are truly college- and career-ready.”

ACT Aspire provides parents with honest feedback about how prepared their child is for college or a career after graduation, and the ACT Aspire scores will align with the ACT assessment that all 11th graders in Alabama take.

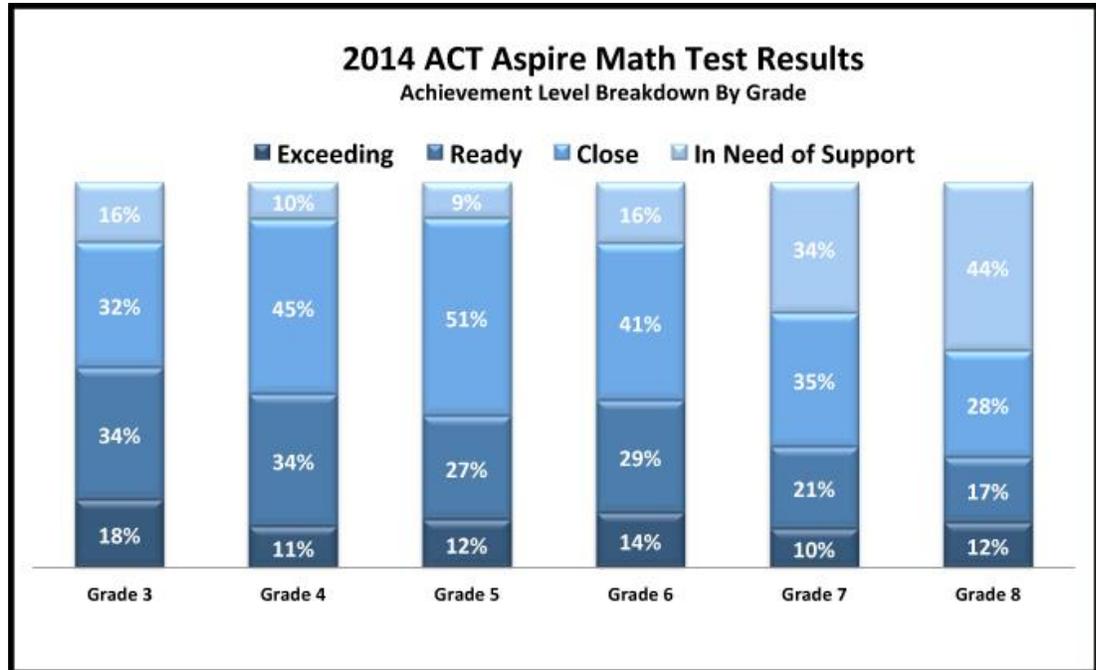
A total of 334,573 students took the ACT Aspire assessment. The ACT Aspire assessment is administered in late spring during the closing weeks of the school year to ensure student learning continues as long as possible. The assessments can be administered in computer-based or paper/pencil format.

-more-

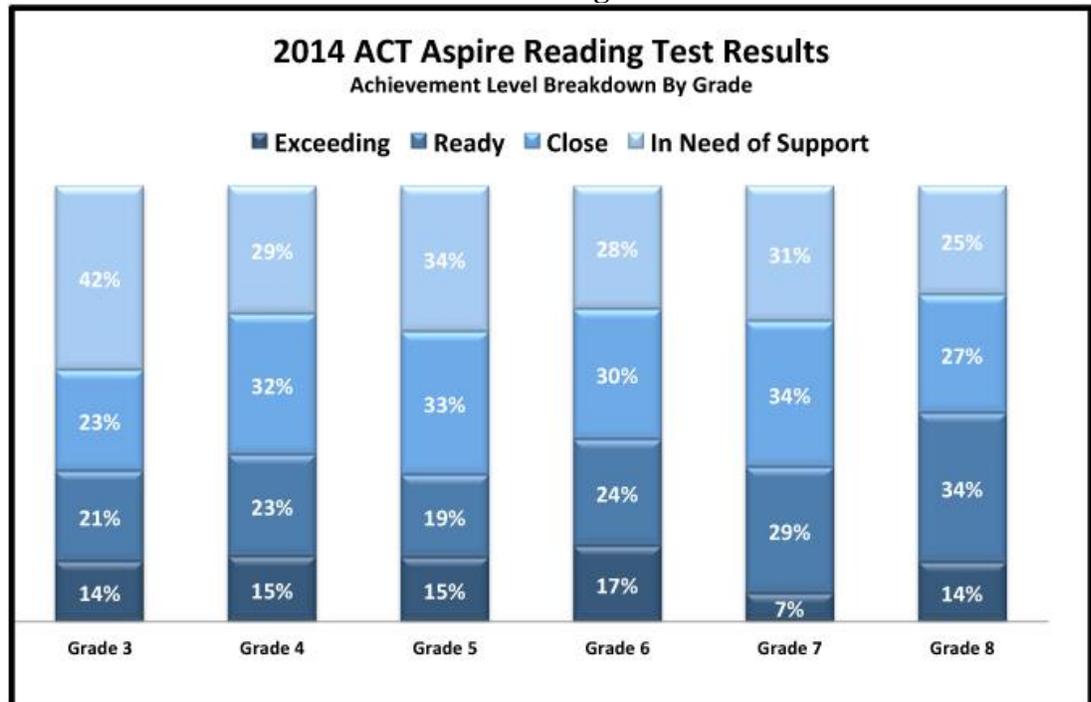
ACT Assessments Establish New Baseline for Student Achievement
New Scores Show Snapshot of Current Academic Standing

Statewide Results of ACT Aspire

Math



Reading



-more-

ACT Assessments Establish New Baseline for Student Achievement

New Scores Show Snapshot of Current Academic Standing

Highlights:

- The results of new assessments offer a new baseline for students' scores.
- The new Alabama College- and Career-Ready Standards (CCRS) are more challenging and some students have not reached average or high proficiency levels – yet.
- Over the coming years, scores and student success – in the classroom and in life – will rise.
- Shifting to CCRS may mean that proficiency levels on assessments may become more challenging.
- A total of 334,573 students took the ACT Aspire assessment.
- The ACT Aspire assessment is administered in late spring during the closing weeks of the school year to ensure student learning continues as long as possible. The assessments can be administered in computer-based or paper/pencil format. In spring of 2015, districts will receive results within 35 to 40 days after the testing window ends. Reports will be available for parents in early fall 2015.
- These scores are shown in terms of “exceeding, ready, close, and in need of support.” for students in Grades 3-8 for Reading and Mathematics.
- Since Alabama’s ACT Aspire assessment is more demanding of students, results in the first years will *appear* to be lower than before. The scores will provide teachers with a better benchmark for where students need more focus.
- Alabama students will continue taking a standardized test each spring, but with the ACT Aspire, Alabama’s public schools will have spent less time testing and more time teaching. From now on, students will only spend a few hours a year taking the ACT Aspire test instead of five days taking the old Alabama Reading and Math Plus Test (ARMT⁺).
- ACT Aspire provides parents with honest feedback about how prepared their child is for college or a career after graduation, and the ACT Aspire scores will align with the ACT that all 11th graders in Alabama take. In the long run students will rise to the challenge.
- Alabama has charted its own course in education by using the ACT Aspire based on the College and Career Ready Standards. The ACT is a well-known organization that Alabamians have trusted for 50 years.

-more-

ACT Assessments Establish New Baseline for Student Achievement
New Scores Show Snapshot of Current Academic Standing

- The results of the ACT Aspire give students, parents, and teachers honest feedback about where students stand and whether or not they are on target to be prepared for real life after high school—whether they continue their education or go straight into the workforce.
- These test scores will help families make smart choices about the future for their students.
- We know that a higher graduation rate will lead to a stronger economy for Alabama, but a critical part of that is making sure students are prepared when they graduate. The ACT Aspire will help teachers, parents and students know whether they are on target to being ready.
- In four years, more than three out of every four jobs in Alabama will require some type of post-secondary education, whether it's a two or four-year degree or some type of industry certification. In order to make sure students are prepared for that, we need to make sure they get honest feedback about where they stand today.
- This is about economic development. By raising the bar for students, we're helping make sure they will be prepared to compete for jobs against people from all over the world.

###