

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Contact: Jill West, 334-279-1886 or 334-868-1542

Montgomery, Ala. – The Alabama State Department of Education released today the state-level aggregated results from the ACT Aspire test given last spring. And as most education leaders and teachers expected, the scores are more aligned with national measurements, placing them lower than levels under former assessments in Alabama.

The State Board of Education is taking a bold step toward a more honest look and more congruent measurement of student achievement, which is a critical first step toward better preparing students for success after high school.

“ACT has been one of the primary college-readiness tests trusted by students and institutions of higher ed,” said A+ policy director, Thomas Rains. “It makes sense that using ACT Aspire as a tool from the elementary grades will make both learning and assessing that learning a smoothly aligned process, informing teachers and parents along the way each, individual student’s progress toward graduation. We commend the State Board of Education for being transparent and taking a proactive, student-centered strategy toward improving education for all students.”

On the ACT Aspire, students are expected to perform at a higher level than on the ARMT in order to be deemed “proficient.” While this change in measurement may look like a decline in performance, the difference in scores is an expected result of a change in measurement.

Results from the ACT Aspire cannot be compared to old Alabama Reading and Math Test (ARMT) results. The two assessments represent wholly different measurement systems of student achievement.

The ACT Aspire measures student achievement more like the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation’s Report Card, that is given to a random sample of students nationwide every two years. NAEP questions are more in-depth than ARMT questions, and are often open-ended instead of multiple-choice.

Over time, performance on the ACT Aspire is expected to rise as Alabama teachers continue implementation of higher standards and higher-level learning practices. (For more information on this difference, please see A+’s recent blog post and policy brief discussing the changes *[[link to blog and brief](#)]*.)

Using the ACT Aspire in the lower grades complements Alabama’s assessment improvements in the upper grades. Unlike previous tests, the ACT Aspire provides meaningful feedback to help ensure students are on target for to college and career readiness before graduation. ACT uses the following reading and math scores on the

ACT Aspire in each grade as benchmarks to determine whether a student is “on target for college readiness by the time they are in 11th grade.”¹

Grade	Reading Score	Math Score
3	415	413
4	417	416
5	420	418
6	421	420
7	423	422
8	424	425

Today’s announcement by the State Department of Education only included state-level aggregate data, and it has not yet released system-level results. However, each school system has received its scores that provide more detail on where its students stand.

Background

The ACT Aspire represents an important part of Plan 2020—the State Board of Education’s strategic plan to ensure all Alabama students graduate from high school ready for real life, whether they continue their education or go straight into a career. The release of the first-year scores sets the benchmarks for Plan 2020, and from this year forward a student’s achievement path will be far more clear and understandable for parents and teachers.

The SBOE adopted the ACT Aspire in April 2013 to replace the Alabama Reading and Math Test for 3rd-8th grades. The new test was developed for Alabama by the well-known non-profit organization ACT, which also administers the college-readiness

¹ Cite for ACT Aspire

test of the same name. The test is aligned to Alabama's new nationally benchmarked College and Career Ready standards adopted in 2010.

By choosing the ACT Aspire, Alabama charted its own course in education policy and declined to use either national assessment aligned to the Common Core State Standards designed by consortia of states, Smarter Balance and PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers).