



Aiming

High

**Helping
All Students
Achieve at
High Levels**



Expect more, Get more.

Dear Parent/Guardian,

In 1993, Washington citizens issued a call to action. Too many students left high school unprepared for work and life in the 21st century. Things had to change.

That year, parents, educators, and community leaders began a bold effort to raise learning standards, strengthen classroom teaching and ensure students mastered key skills. Today, we expect great things from all students.

We have high, statewide learning standards that ask students to:

1. Read with comprehension, write with skill and communicate effectively,
2. Know and apply core concepts and principles of math, science, history, the arts, health and fitness,
3. Think analytically, logically and creatively, using experience and knowledge to make reasoned judgments and solve problems,
4. Understand the importance of work and how performance, effort and decisions affect future career and educational opportunities.

We test to make sure students and schools reach these goals. The Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) is an important part of this comprehensive, statewide plan. It helps ensure that all students graduate with the skills and knowledge to build a positive future.

Expect more, get more.

You're receiving this booklet because your child will soon take the WASL in reading, writing, math and possibly science.

Thousands of students take WASL tests each spring. The results are used by parents, classroom teachers, schools, districts and state leaders to find out how well students and schools are doing.

Everyone wants to make sure that your child learns to read, write, think critically and communicate.

This booklet has information to help you and your child prepare for state tests. In the fall, you should receive a follow-up booklet called *Reaching Higher* explaining your child's score report in more detail.

Education reform: Where are we?

1993	1997	2000	2001	2003	2004	2005-07	2008	2010
Legislature enacts HB 1209 calling for high standards, assessment and new graduation requirements	4th-graders take the WASL in reading, writing, mathematics and listening	State Board of Education creates new graduation requirements for the class of 2008	7th- and 10th-graders take the WASL in reading, writing, mathematics and listening	Science added to the WASL; funding for listening tests dropped	Alternative assessments, retakes approved and funded by state legislature	Academic help offered to students; WASL retakes available for 10th-graders; WASL tests for grades 3,5,6 and 8 phased in per federal law	Class of 2008 required to pass reading, writing and math WASL to meet graduation requirements	Passing the science WASL becomes part of high school graduation requirements

Common concerns, singular answers.

Our new focus on skills worries many parents. How do state standards shape classroom work, affect self-esteem, impact graduation and more? Read on to get responses to some common concerns.

Students are also expected to study the arts, social studies, health and fitness.

Although there are no WASL tests in the arts, social studies, and health and fitness, students need these classes to round out their education. That's why these subjects are included in our state's learning goals. That's also why the state is developing classroom-based assessments for these subjects.

Teaching and learning are year-round processes. State testing happens once a year.

The WASL measures the skills students already are supposed to be learning. And research shows that students perform better on the WASL when their teachers use state learning standards, not the test itself, as a guide. Year-round, in-depth learning and teaching helps all students. Remember, the WASL measures student mastery of skills such as reading, writing, critical thinking and reasoning. These cannot be taught in a day or week or month. They are learned over time.

Washington's standards are high. With help, students can reach them.

Washington does have high standards, and they should be high. We ask students to master the core skills and knowledge they need to succeed in today's world. We need to maintain high standards so students are prepared for the future. If we provide quality teaching aligned to state standards and ample resources, most students can reach our goals. Of course, the WASL is not the right test for all students. English language learners may receive testing assistance and students with disabilities can receive assistance or take an alternate test.

Even 'A' and 'B' students may struggle with questions on the WASL.

A's and B's do not guarantee WASL success or failure. Report cards and WASL scores measure different things. Classroom grades show whether your child meets district-, school- or classroom-level expectations. They take into account homework, tests, attendance, behavior, ability and effort. WASL scores tell you whether your child knows and can apply core skills and whether your child can communicate ideas effectively. Some "C" students will pass state tests. Some "A" students will not.

High school juniors and seniors still have a lot of work to do after passing the WASL.

Passing the 10th grade WASL means the student met state goals for what students should know and be able to do by the 10th grade. It does not mean a student is ready for college or the world of work. High school students need to continue taking English, math, science, social studies, world languages and more. Those classes are needed for college admission and success in the workplace.

Testing helps students learn and schools improve teaching.

Based on WASL scores, students may receive extra help in class. Schools also use test results to focus on students' areas of weakness. In 2008, passing the WASL will be required to graduate from high school. And students who opt out of earlier testing lose the chance to get used to WASL-type exams. Starting this year, 10th-grade students who take and pass one or more WASL tests will receive a special seal for their high school diploma. It's also likely that WASL results will be one factor considered for college admission in the near future.

Grade-by-grade progress checks

Grade	3rd	4th	5th	6th	7th	8th	9th	10th
Reading	2006 ●	■	2006 ●	2006 ●	■	2006 ●	No test	▲ ■
Mathematics	2006 ●	■	2006 ●	2006 ●	■	2006 ●	No test	▲ ■
Writing	No test	■	No test	No test	■	No test	No test	▲ ■
Science	No test	No test	□	No test	No test	■	No test	△ ■

- WASL Tests Required Under State Law
- New Tests Required Under the Federal No Child Left Behind Law
- ▲ Required for High School Graduation in 2008
- Test is Offered in All Schools and Districts, but School/District Participation Not Required Until 2005
- △ Required for High School Graduation in 2010

Parents are teachers, too.

Unlike traditional tests, the WASL asks students to apply their skills and knowledge to real-life situations. This means learning in the home is as important as what happens in school. Here are some tips for building your child's skills, every day. For more tips, check your school or district Web site or call your child's school.

- Ensure your child reads a variety of things at least 15-20 minutes each day. Books, magazines and newspapers are great.
- Show your child that you value education. Help your child set goals and create a positive plan for the future.
- Listen to your child. Talk about schoolwork, grades and future plans often.
- Encourage your child to speak and write in complete sentences. Create good habits that last a lifetime.
- Ask your child to describe events and ideas in detail. Support main ideas with facts.
- Urge your child to write letters to family and friends, then re-read those letters aloud. Practice reading and revising written work.
- Review homework and completed assignments. Challenge your child to correct any errors.
- On trips to stores around town, work together to figure out how many miles you traveled or which items offer a better value. For older students, add complexity by comparing the cost of attending different colleges or financing a used car.

Keep it all in perspective

Students and parents can feel pressured by WASL testing. But the test shouldn't be the center of attention. It's the core skills and knowledge that matter most. The trick is to find a healthy balance and keep the WASL in perspective.

Help your child take assessments seriously but try not to panic.

The WASL is just one measure of your child's skills. It is not the only measure. All anyone can ask is for students to try their best.

Think about your child's test day routine in advance.

Changing your child's normal routine before a test can be more upsetting than helpful. Some children need more sleep or a good breakfast to do their best. For others, extra attention only adds stress. You know your child best. In most cases, WASL test days should be treated like any other school day.

Allow time for your child to discuss the test day experience.

Give your child the chance to talk about tests after school. Your child may or may not want to share and that's OK. Offer encouragement and support, but try not to focus on specific questions and answers.

Test Tips

A new test for a new generation

Few parents understand how WASL tests differ from tests they took in school. Here's how things have changed...

Traditional "Standardized" Tests	WASL Tests
■ 100% multiple choice	■ Combined multiple choice, short answer and essay
■ Scored by machines	■ Scored by specially trained educators, many of them from Washington
■ Students' performance is compared to other students	■ Student performance is measured against state standards
■ Measures some skills, such as vocabulary and math computation, very well	■ Measures student ability to read, write, solve problems and communicate ideas in ways that cannot be scored by machines
■ Timed tests, students may feel pressure to complete the test quickly	■ Not a timed test, students have ample time to do their best work

Samples of actual WASL questions

These questions came from actual WASL tests given in 2002 and 2003. To view more questions like these, along with scored, unidentified student responses, visit www.k12.wa.us/assessment/WASL/testquestions.aspx.

4th Grade Reading

The following questions are based on a poem about a girl named Nan.

1. How is the way Nan acts at the beginning of the poem different from the way she acts at the end?

2. Why does she act different?

7th Grade Math

Look at the equation below.

$$72 + 58 = 130$$

Chris added 70 and 60 to find the sum instead of using the number sentence above. Clearly explain or show why Chris's method results in the same answer.

10th Grade Writing

Directions:

For this writing task, you will have the opportunity to follow all of the steps of the writing process: prewriting, writing a first draft, revising, editing, and writing a final draft. You may use a thesaurus and dictionary in print or electronic form. Spell check may not be used. Please note: the only piece of writing that will be scored for this writing task is your final draft. Your score will be based on the scoring criteria listed on the previous page.

Your Task

Many people have expressed concern about the starting time for high school. The school board has suggested that school begin and end two hours later. Take a position on this proposal and write a multi-paragraph letter to the school board to convince them to agree with your position.

Since this is an assessment of your writing ability, be sure to refer to the scoring criteria provided to develop an appropriate persuasive essay.

8th Grade Science

On the science test, students are given data or facts and asked to make predictions, draw conclusions or design new investigations to test their ideas.

In one scenario, a student wants to know how chewing affects the mass of bubble gum and chewing gum. In a scientific experiment, the student measures the mass of both types of gum, before and after chewing. The results of the investigation are listed in a data table.

Given the test results, test-takers must write a conclusion that answers the investigative question. In the conclusion, test-takers were asked to:

- Include data from the table, and
- Explain how the data supports the conclusion.

Sample Questions

Contact your school or district

- **Visit your school or district Web site.**
Get information about its standards and goals.
- **Visit the Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction Web site: www.k12.wa.us** to review statewide plans for learning improvement.
- **Check out the Partnership for Learning Web site: www.partnership4learning.org.** It contains lots of good information about new graduation requirements for the class of 2008 and beyond.
- **Talk to your local Parent Teacher Association (PTA) representative, or visit the Washington State PTA Web site: <http://www.wastatepta.org>.**

Get
more
Info

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