

What is the WASL and why do we have it?

The Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) is used to measure how well students are meeting the state's learning standards (the Essential Academic Learning Requirements and grade-level expectations). The WASL meets requirements for annual standardized testing of all students under state and federal law.

What subjects are tested on the WASL?

Reading, writing, math and science.

Who takes the WASL and when?

The WASL is administered every spring in grades 3-8 and 10. Students are tested in reading and math in grades 3 through 8 and 10; in writing in grades 4, 7 and 10; and in science in grades 5, 8 and 10.

Testing accommodations are made for special education students and English Language Learners are not required to take the reading and writing WASL during their first year in the U.S.

How much time do students spend taking the WASL?

On average, students are tested one to two hours per day, with total testing time ranging from five to 10 hours. School districts are given a three week window to administer the 3rd-8th grade WASL and eight days to give the high school WASL. However, it is important to note that the WASL is not a

timed test and students can take as long as they need to finish.

Because the WASL is aligned to the state's learning standards, teachers do not need to take time away from regular teaching to prepare students to take the WASL.

What do WASL test questions look like?

The WASL includes a blend of multiple-choice, short-answer and essay questions that require students to apply their critical thinking skills to solve problems and explain their answers.

What is a passing score on the WASL? What does it mean to "meet standard"?

Students get two scores: a scale score and a level score. The scale score is a raw number (e.g. 410). That score then places a student into one of four levels: Advanced (Level 4), Proficient (Level 3), Basic (Level 2) and Below Basic (Level 1). This is the student's level score.

Level 3 or higher is a "passing" score.

I've heard changes are being made to improve the WASL. What are these changes?

The WASL tests for grades 3-8 are being shortened to reduce testing time, scoring time, and expense. In most grades, the length will be reduced by 30 percent allowing educators to administer the test over one day as opposed to two. The rigor of tests will not be compromised by reduction in length.

Starting with the Class of 2014, students will need to pass two math end-of-course assessments (Algebra I and Geometry or Integrated Math I and II) instead of the high school WASL math test to graduate from high school, in addition to passing other state graduation requirements.

How are WASL results used?

State legislature and the federal government have approved the WASL to serve as one

Education Reform Timeline

- **1993:** Washington Education Reform Act calls for creation of statewide standards, assessments and accountability for continuous improvement in student learning.
- **1996-01:** WASL testing phased in for grades 4, 7 and 10.
- **2001:** Federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) requires annual testing in grades 3-8 and once in high school. WASL is the federally-approved test.
- **2004:** New graduation requirements for Class of 2008: pass high school WASL, complete culminating project, create High School and Beyond Plan and earn minimum course credits (19).
- **2007:** From 2003 to 2007, high school graduation rate improves 7 percentage points. Black and Hispanic students make double digit gains.
- **2008:** First class to meet new statewide graduation requirements. 93 percent of graduates pass reading and writing WASL.
- **2013:** Passing the high school math and science WASL added to the graduation requirements. Proposed phase-in of new minimum high school coursework requirements (CORE 24) begins.
- **2014:** High school math end-of-course exams replace high school WASL math test as a graduation requirement.
- **2016:** Proposed that a minimum of 24 high school course credits are needed to graduate.

basis of accountability for students, schools and districts and the state. WASL results are one piece of information that educators use to improve teaching and to do a better job of meeting every student's academic needs.



Is passing the WASL a requirement to graduate from high school?

By 12th grade, students must pass the reading and writing portions of the high school WASL (or a state approved alternative) to earn a high school diploma.

The Legislature postponed requiring passage on math and science portions of the test until the Class of 2013. Until then, students who do not pass the math portion of the high school WASL are required to continue to pass math courses. High school students are given multiple opportunities to retake the high school WASL and every district provides summer school or other support classes to students who do not pass.

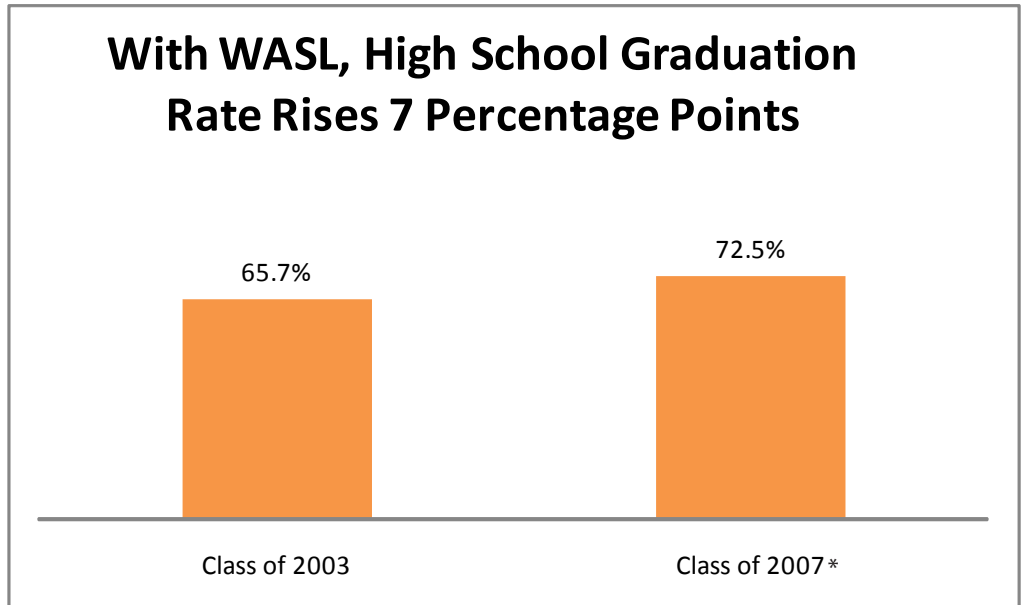
Starting with the Class of 2014, end-of-course assessments for math will replace the math portion of the high school WASL.

What are the state-approved alternatives to passing the high school WASL?

Approved alternatives include submitting a portfolio of student work meeting state standards, earning scores at or above a state-designated level on nationally available high school tests (e.g. SAT, ACT, AP), or comparing the student's grades with the grades of students who passed the WASL.

What else must students do to earn a high school diploma?

In addition to passing the high school WASL, every student must take 19 course credits (potentially increasing to 24 credits beginning with the Class of 2016), submit a High School and Beyond Plan detailing what



*On-time High School Graduation Rate = percentage of entering 9th graders who graduated high school (HS) in 4 years.
Source: Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction * Final 2008 Graduation Rate not yet available.*

he/she plans to do upon graduation, and complete a culminating project. Many school districts have additional requirements.

Do the majority of Washington students pass the WASL?

About 93 percent of last year's graduating high school seniors passed the WASL reading and writing requirement for graduation.

What's happened to the high school graduation rate since the start of the high school WASL?

High school students have been required to take the high school WASL in 10th grade since 2001. (Although the Class of 2008 was the first group of students required to pass sections of

the high school WASL to earn a high school diploma.)

The on-time graduation rate rose from 65.7 percent for the Class of 2003 to 72.5 percent for the Class of 2007. Black and Hispanic students made double digit gains, of 21 and 11 percentage points respectively.

What's happened to the high school dropout rate since the start of the high school WASL?

The percentage of high school students who drop out declined from 24.3 percent for the Class of 2003 to 21 percent for the Class of 2007.

As compared to the Class of 2003, the dropout rate among Black and Hispanic students declined by 12 and 10 percentage points, respectively.

Does the WASL unfairly penalize low-income and minority students?

No. Every WASL question goes through extensive analysis by a Bias and Cultural Fairness Committee of specially trained educators and each question is reviewed to ensure there is no cultural bias in the exam.

About Partnership for Learning

Partnership for Learning is an independent, statewide nonprofit organization that communicates about Washington State's school improvement efforts and the need to better prepare *all* of our high school graduates for the demands of today's global society.

For more information about the WASL and other key education issues, contact us at info@partnership4learning.org.