



STUDENT ASSESSMENT AND SCHOOL ACCOUNTABILITY IN UTAH

Utah Legislature
Office of Legislative Research and General Counsel

HIGHLIGHTS

- The purpose of the Utah Performance Assessment System for Students (U-PASS) has expanded. U-PASS was originally designed to provide information on student achievement for the purpose of evaluating public school programs. Making computer adaptive testing a component of U-PASS provides information to teachers that may be used to adapt instruction to a student's skill level.
- A requirement to administer a basic skills competency test in the tenth grade was suspended for the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, while a program was implemented to pilot alternatives to the basic skills competency test. In the 2013 General Session or a prior special session, the Legislature may consider proposed legislation to eliminate the basic skills competency test and provide for assessments that indicate a student's college and career readiness.
- To comply with legislation directing the State Board of Education to recommend modifications to a school grading system, the board assembled a committee of education leaders and stakeholders. The committee, with the assistance of a technical consultant, developed a school accountability system that may be used to assign grades to schools. The U.S. Department of Education has recently allowed Utah to use this school accountability system in place of a federally prescribed school accountability system. In the 2013 General Session, the Legislature may consider legislation to adopt the new school accountability system to assign letter grades to schools.

In the past few years, Utah legislators have considered numerous proposals on student testing and how to hold schools accountable for student learning. Recently enacted legislation includes bills to pilot new assessments, adopt computer adaptive testing, and grade schools with an A, B, C, D, or F letter grade. Other proposals considered include replacing the basic skills competency test administered in tenth grade with college- and career-readiness assessments.

In addition to the changes adopted or considered by the Utah Legislature, the U.S. Department of Education has recently authorized changes to a school accountability system required by federal law. In June 2012, the U.S. Department of Education granted Utah a waiver of certain requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The waiver allows Utah to replace elements of the school accountability system created under the federal law with an accountability system developed by the state.

The purpose of this issue brief is to give an overview of the statewide assessment and school accountability systems, highlight recent changes to those systems, and identify issues related to assessment or accountability that the Legislature may be asked to consider in the 2013 General Session.

UTAH PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT SYSTEM FOR STUDENTS (U-PASS)

The system of assessments administered statewide to Utah public school students is known as U-PASS. The original purpose of U-PASS, as established in 2000, was to provide information about the proficiency achieved by students so that the public, the Legislature, the State Board of Education, school districts, public schools, and teachers may evaluate the effectiveness of programs in public schools.¹ To accomplish this purpose, the State Board of Education was directed to develop a method of uniformly assessing the performance of students in grades 3 through 12 in

mastering basic skills courses.² A basic skills course is defined in Utah law as “a subject which requires mastery of specific functions, as defined under rules made by the State Board of Education,

to include reading, language arts, mathematics, science in grades 4 through 12, and effectiveness of written expression.”³

Table 1 shows the basic skills courses tested under U-PASS. Note the secondary mathematics courses tested are proposed to change. In 2010, the State Board of Education adopted the Common Core State Standards (Common Core) as Utah’s English language arts and mathematics core standards. The Common Core was developed by a consortium of states and has been adopted by 45 states. Utah public schools are in the process of aligning instruction with the 2010 core standards. By the 2014-15 school year, U-PASS tests will be fully aligned with the new core standards.

Table 1

Basic Skills Courses Tested under U-PASS	
English Language Arts	Grade levels 3 - 11
Mathematics courses aligned with 2007 core standards	Grade levels 3 - 7, prealgebra, algebra I, algebra II, geometry
Mathematics courses aligned with 2010 core standards	Grade levels 3 - 8, secondary math I, secondary math II (proposed)
Science	Grade levels 4 - 8, earth systems, biology, chemistry, physics

Other U-PASS assessments include an online writing assessment administered in grades 5 and 8, a basic skills competency test administered in grade 10, and a test administered in grade 3 to determine a student’s reading grade level.⁴

Computer Adaptive Testing

In 2008, the Legislature authorized a pilot computer adaptive testing program that provides several advantages over the traditional end-of-course tests of basic skills courses. First, a computer adaptive test assesses the full range of a student’s skills by not limiting test questions to those corresponding to the student’s grade level. Questions on a computer adaptive test get progressively more difficult or less difficult depending upon the student’s skill level. Second, with computer adaptive testing, assessments may be administered throughout the school year to monitor a student’s learning progress. A teacher can use those assessment results to adapt instruction to a student’s skill level.

In the 2012 General Session, the Legislature enacted H.B. 15, “Statewide Adaptive Testing,” to expand computer adaptive testing statewide. A \$6.7 million appropriation contained in the bill, together with \$4.7 million in the Utah State Office of Education’s base budget for tests of basic skills courses, is available for the statewide computer adaptive testing system.⁵ The State Board of Education will issue a request for proposals for a computer adaptive testing system, and, as directed by H.B. 15, shall require school districts and charter schools to implement computer adaptive testing no later than the 2014-15 school year.

To assist school districts and charter schools in acquiring the technology infrastructure necessary to implement computer adaptive testing, the Legislature enacted S.B. 97, “Grants for Online Testing,” in the 2012 General Session. The bill appropriates \$7.6 million in one-time money for grants to school districts and charter schools to purchase computers, peripheral equipment, software, or technical support to implement a computer adaptive testing system.

Pilot Program on Alternatives to the Tenth Grade Basic Skills Competency Test

In accordance with Utah Code Section 53A-1-611, a student may not receive a basic high school diploma if the student fails to pass a basic skills competency test. The test is first administered in the tenth grade, and a student who fails the test has multiple opportunities to retake the test. As provided by State Board of Education rule, a student who has not passed the basic skills competency test by the end of the student's senior year may receive a certificate of completion or a diploma indicating that the student did not receive a passing score.⁶

Legislation enacted in the 2010 General Session, H.B. 166, "Reductions to Education Mandates," exempted school districts and charter schools from the requirement to administer the tenth grade basic skills competency test in the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years. During that two-year period, a program was established to pilot alternatives to the basic skills competency test. Pilot schools assessed basic skills using computer adaptive testing or administered the ACT and other college- and career-readiness tests. The alternative assessments provide information to help students plan high school coursework so they are prepared for postsecondary education and training.

Legislation was introduced in the 2012 General Session, but did not pass, to eliminate the basic skills competency test, require school districts and charter schools to administer college- and career-readiness assessments, and provide for a differentiated diploma contingent upon a student's performance on a college- and career-readiness assessment.⁷ Because the basic skills competency test exemption provided in H.B. 166 was limited to the 2010-11 and 2011-12 school years, the requirement to administer a basic skills competency test is currently in effect for the 2012-13 school year and thereafter.

HOLDING SCHOOLS ACCOUNTABLE FOR STUDENT LEARNING

School Grading

In the 2011 General Session, the Legislature enacted legislation to establish a school grading system in which a school is annually designated a grade of A, B, C, D, or F based on the performance of the school's students on statewide assessments,

and for a high school, the graduation rate and measures that indicate college and career readiness.⁸ The bill directed the State Board of Education to model the school grading system described in law and make recommendations to the Education Interim Committee on modifications to the school grading system. To fulfill those responsibilities, the Utah State Office of Education assembled a committee of education leaders and stakeholders. The committee, with technical assistance provided by the National Center for the Improvement of Education Assessment, developed an accountability system that may be used to assign grades to schools.

In November 2011, the Education Interim Committee received the State Board of Education's recommendations for the modified school grading system.⁹ To allow more discussion and consideration of the proposed changes, a bill was enacted in the 2012 General Session to direct the State Board of Education to report again to the Education Interim Committee by September 2012.¹⁰

School Accountability Required by No Child Left Behind

On September 23, 2011, the U.S. Secretary of Education invited states to request flexibility regarding specific requirements of the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001.¹¹ States were given the opportunity to replace the federal accountability system with an accountability system developed by the state. Under the federal accountability system, schools were annually evaluated based on meeting targets for the percentage of students proficient on English language arts and mathematics assessments with the goal of all students attaining proficiency by 2014.

The State Board of Education submitted a flexibility request to adopt the accountability system developed for school grading and received approval of its flexibility request on June 29, 2012. The new state-developed accountability system is referred to as the Utah Comprehensive Accountability System (UCAS) in the approved flexibility request. Beginning with the 2011-12 school year, UCAS will replace the federal accountability system and the previous state accountability system.¹² The State Board of Education had developed an accountability system in accordance with Utah Code Subsection 53A-1-605(2)(b) which requires the board to "identify schools not achieving state-established acceptable levels of student performance in order to assist

those schools in raising their student performance levels.”

Under UCAS, a school will receive points for the achievement and learning growth of its students as evidenced by scores on the tests of basic skills

courses listed in **Table 1** and the direct writing assessment administered in grades 5 and 8. To measure learning growth, a minimum of two scores is needed in a given content area. A high school will also receive points for the percentage of students graduating.

Figure 1 shows the structure of the elementary and middle school accountability model, and **Figure 2** shows the structure of the high school accountability model. With both models, the learning growth of below proficient students is counted twice, giving an incentive to schools to bring all students up to proficiency.

Figure 1: Structure of Elementary and Middle School Accountability Model.

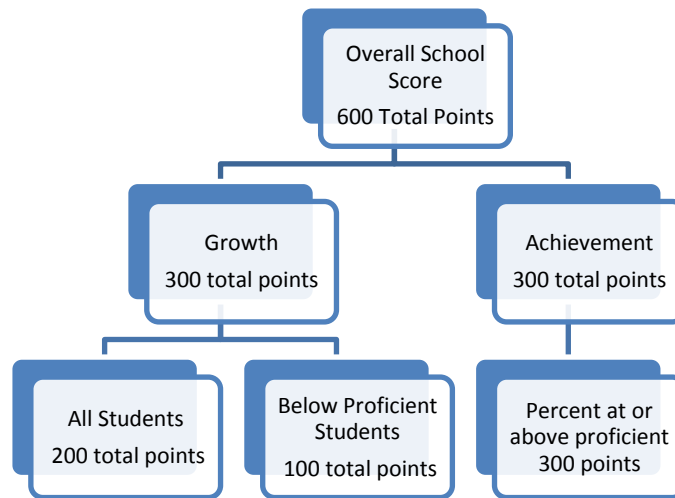
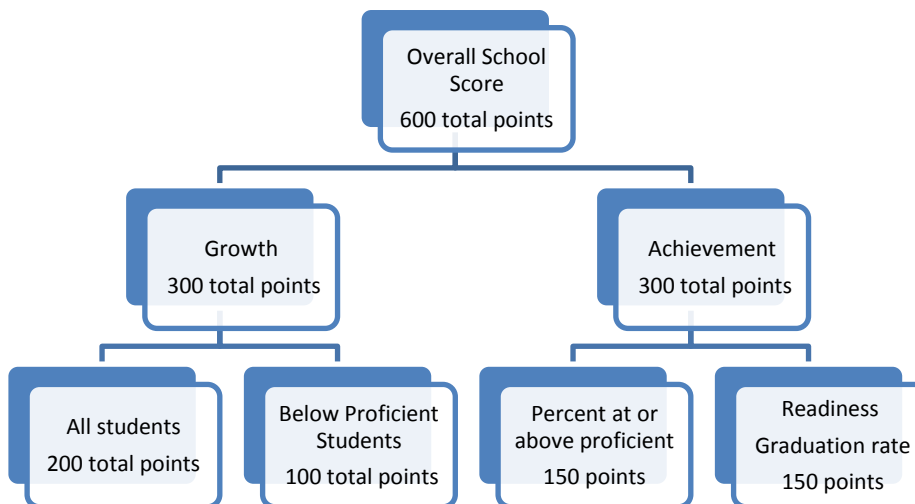


Figure 2: Structure of High School Accountability Model



A school report card showing a school's composite score, achievement score, learning progress score, and a percentile ranking within the state will be displayed on the website of the Public School Data Gateway. Additional data not used in calculating a school's composite score and data disaggregated by ethnicity and other factors will be available on the school report card. The accountability system described in Utah's approved flexibility request does not provide for designating an A, B, C, D, or F letter grade to a school.

ISSUES FOR THE 2013 GENERAL SESSION

In the 2013 General Session or a prior special session, the Legislature may consider proposed legislation to repeal the requirement to administer a basic skills competency test and to provide for assessments that indicate a student's college and career readiness.

The Legislature may also consider a bill modifying the school grading system and, specifically, whether the school accountability system approved in Utah's flexibility request should be adopted to assign letter grades to a school.

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1. *Utah Code Annotated* §53A-1-601 (2012).
 2. *Utah Code Annotated* §53A-1-603 (2012).
 3. *Utah Code Annotated* §53A-1-602 (2012).
 4. *Utah Code Annotated* §53A-1-603 (2012).
 5. Utah Office of the Legislative Fiscal Analyst, Fiscal Note for H.B. 15, "Statewide Adaptive Testing" (2012), available at <http://le.utah.gov/lfa/fnotes/2012/HB0015.fn.pdf>.
 6. *Utah Administrative Code* § R277-705-7.
 7. *College and Career Readiness Assessment*, S.B. 10, 59th Leg., Gen. Sess. (Utah 2012).
 8. *School Grading System*, S.B. 59, 59th Leg., Gen. Sess. (Utah 2011).
 9. Utah State Office of Education, *Utah School Grade Accountability System, Recommendation Summary*, available at www.le.utah.gov/interim/2011/pdf/00002465.pdf.
 10. *School Grading Amendments*, S.B. 175, 59th Leg., Gen. Sess. (Utah 2012).
 11. Arne Duncan (U.S. Secretary of Education) to Chief State School Officers, September 23, 2011, available at <http://www2.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/secletter/110923.html>.
 12. Utah State Office of Education, *Utah ESEA Flexibility*, August 8, 2012, available at www.schools.gov/data/Educational-Data/Accountability-School-Performance/ESEA_Flexibility_8-8-12.aspx.



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