

**NSCAS Frequently Asked Questions
2018-2019**

1. **How do you pronounce NSCAS?**

It is pronounced, “en-skass.”

1. **Which grade levels are assessed by the Nebraska Student-Centered Assessment System (NSCAS)?**

NSCAS encompasses assessments and associated resources provided by schools, districts, and the Nebraska Department of Education (NDE) for grades K-12.

* NDE provides technology tools that support teacher-created formative assessments for grades 3 – 8 at no cost to districts.
* NDE provides MAP Growth, an optional interim assessment for English language arts, math, and science, for grades 3 – 8 at no cost to districts.
* The summative component of NSCAS includes the NSCAS General Summative and NSCAS Alternate Summative for grades 3 – 8 (English language arts and math, grades 3 – 8; science, grades 3 & 5) and the NSCAS ACT and NSCAS Alternate Summative for students in their third year of high school, typically juniors (English language arts, math, science, grade 11).
1. **When will the 2019 NSCAS General Summative assessment results be available?**
The 2019 NSCAS General Summative results will be made available after a post-equating process is completed in the summer. This process ensures that results from different test forms have equivalent meaning. For example, students in grade three taking the NSCAS General Summative don’t all see the same test items – they are seeing different forms of a test designed to measure their performance against third grade content area standards. Post-equating ensures that the results from different forms of the same test are considered the same; it is important for establishing validity across forms and years.
2. **Is it possible for NSCAS General Summative results to be made available more quickly?**The NDE is invested in getting Nebraska educators the data they need to inform instruction and support student learning in a timely fashion. The department is also committed to investing the time required to ensure that the data educators receive is accurate and high quality. For these reasons, the department is working with NWEA to explore approaches, such as pre-equating (completing equating before instead of after the test is administered), that produce valid, high quality data while enabling a more rapid return of summative test results. We appreciate the partnership and patience of Nebraska districts as we work toward this goal.
3. **How can you explain the differences in 2018 NSCAS General Summative mathematics scores vs. 2017 NeSA General Summative mathematics scores?**Student scores in mathematics on the NSCAS 2018 test changed in comparison to mathematics scores on the NeSA 2017 test because in 2018, the summative assessment measured Nebraska student performance against new College and Career Ready (CCR) standards for mathematics. The CCR standards for mathematics are more rigorous than the standards against which students were measured in preceding years. In other words, the 2017 NeSA test was assessing student performance against a different set of standards, so results from 2018 and 2017 cannot be compared. With recent revisions to Nebraska’s content area standards for English language arts, math, and science, it may take time for student scores to increase as curriculum and instruction continue to evolve to teach to these more rigorous standards.
4. **Are you using MAP Growth for summative assessment?**
No. MAP Growth is an interim assessment used by all Nebraska school districts (and provided by NDE) to measure students’ academic growth in math, science, and English language arts (called “reading” and “language” in MAP Growth). It shows what students know and are ready to learn next, irrespective of grade level. The NSCAS General Summative is built on the same technology as MAP Growth but it works differently, as it is a different assessment that serves a different purpose. Instead of measuring student performance across grade levels like MAP Growth, the NSCAS General Summative measures student performance against Nebraska’s grade-level expectations, or content area standards.
5. **Is the state using MAP Growth data for accountability purposes?**
No, Nebraska does not use MAP Growth for state accountability purposes and administration of MAP Growth is optional. Rather, NDE is providing MAP Growth and formative assessment resources to Nebraska school districts in recognition of the role that assessment plays in supporting instruction that helps students progress toward mastery of content area standards in English language arts, math, and science. Accountability for a Quality Education System, Today and Tomorrow (AQuESTT) remains the Nebraska State Accountability System of which NSCAS is one component.
6. **Does assessment play a role in subjects outside of English language arts, math, and science?**
We think that assessment and instructional materials built on Nebraska’s content area standards hold value across a variety of content areas and grades. We will continue to seek feedback from Nebraska educators on additional assessment needs, including those in subjects and grade levels not covered by the annual summative assessment.
7. **If you add assessments for other subject areas, how will this impact classroom time?**While assessments do take some time, they reveal valuable information about student learning needs that in turn maximizes classroom time by helping teachers adjust their instruction to accelerate learning. It’s akin to a visit to the doctor. The doctor is better equipped to effectively and efficiently address your health needs when he/she takes the time to gather appropriate information from you up front, versus gathering limited information and trying various treatments until one works (a less efficient and more time-consuming approach). Thus, if teachers identify grades and subject areas where they could benefit from using assessments to efficiently address learning needs, we will explore how we might be able to help.
8. **Will you administer the NSCAS-ACT to students in their third year of high school again in 2019?**Yes, Nebraska state law passed in 2016 (LB930) required all students in their third year of high school, typically juniors, to take a college admissions test instead of the NeSA statewide summative assessment. The NSCAS ACT will be given again to all third-year Nebraska high school students in 2019 to assess performance in English language arts, math, and science. We are administering the NSCAS ACT to all third-year high school students because it reflects higher expectations. and provides more postsecondary opportunities, as third-year students can send their scores to up to four colleges of their choice at no cost. The NSCAS Alternate will be available for students who qualify for having significant cognitive disabilities.
9. **What is the difference between 2018 ACT** **scores for Nebraska’s graduating class and the 2018 NSCAS ACT scores?**The average ACT scores for Nebraska graduates released by ACT in October 2018 are based on the scores of 2018 graduates only. In other words, they are based on the ACT performance of graduates who took the exam as third-year high school students (typically juniors) in the spring of 2017 as part of NSCAS, *or* on their performance if they retook the exam the following year in 2018. In contrast, the 2018 NSCAS ACT scores scheduled for release in December 2018 by NDE are only for students who took the exam as third-year high school students in spring 2018 and will graduate in the spring of 2019.
10. **Why are the average ACT scores for 2018 Nebraska graduates lower than for 2017 Nebraska graduates?**The drop was anticipated due to the increase in the number of students taking the ACT. The number of graduating students who took the ACT rose by more than 5,500, up from 18,993 in 2017 to 24,516 in 2018. This increase stemmed from the fact that Nebraska started offering the ACT for free to all third-year high school students, typically juniors, in 2017. With more students taking the ACT, including those who may not be planning to pursue college, Nebraska’s average scores were lower than in previous years.
11. **Can the average ACT scores for 2018 Nebraska graduates be compared to 2017 NSCAS ACT scores? What about 2018 NSCAS ACT scores?**An apples-to-apples comparison between average ACT scores for 2018 graduates and 2017 NSCAS ACT scores cannot be made, as not all students who took the exam in 2017 as third-year high school students retook it in 2018. In addition, a comparison cannot be made between the average ACT scores of 2018 Nebraska graduates and 2018 NSCAS ACT scores because these scores measure the performance of two different groups of students (2018 seniors for the former, and 2018 third-year students, typically juniors, for the latter).
12. **How do NSCAS formative and interim measures help Nebraska students prepare for the NSCAS General Summative? Will scores increase?**Integrated daily as part of classroom teaching, formative practice helps Nebraska teachers check for student understanding and adjust instruction accordingly to help students progress toward mastery of Nebraska’s content area standards. Similarly, MAP Growth, an optional interim assessment, allows educators to track growth toward proficiency levels and, starting in 2019, to predict performance on the NSCAS General Summative assessment. With recent revisions to Nebraska’s content area standards for English language arts, math, and science, it may take time for student scores to increase as curriculum and instruction continue to evolve to teach to these more rigorous standards.
13. **Why is NDE involved in providing assessments beyond the annual spring summative?**NDE invests in formative and interim assessment in recognition of the important role that assessment data plays in accelerating student learning. This is why NDE also invests in professional learning that helps teachers use assessment data effectively to inform instructional decisions.
14. **How is NDE supporting districts in selecting instructional materials aligned with state standards?**NDE is committed to supporting districts as they select and implement instructional materials aligned to Nebraska’s content area standards. The Nebraska Instructional Materials Collaborative (https://nematerialsmatter.org/), or NIMC, highlights high-quality, standards-aligned instructional materials and offers Nebraska-specific guidance documents to ensure materials meet the expectations of Nebraska’s Content Area Standards. Through the NIMC, NDE and key partners are committed to providing statewide leadership that informs and supports the decisions made locally related to curriculum and instructional materials.

The NIMC draws upon the independent reviews of instructional materials for ELA and mathematics, as provided by EdReports (www.edreports.org). EdReports is an independent, nonprofit organization that reviews instructional materials to help educators seek, identify, and demand the highest-quality instructional materials. Educators complete the EdReports reviews and each report represents hundreds of hours of work by the reviewers. These reviews are organized by “gateways,” wherein each gateway considers standards alignment, fundamental design elements, and other attributes of high-quality curriculum. The EdReports reviews reflect reviews of instructional materials compared to the Common Core State Standards. Because of this, the NIMC includes resources to determine how EdReports reviews support alignment to Nebraska’s standards and instructional shifts.
15. **How does NSCAS relate to your ESSA plan? Your Strategic Plan and Direction?**

The ESSA planning process provided NDE with an opportunity to seamlessly blend its Strategic Vision and Direction and its accountability system, AQuESTT.

Both the Strategic Vision and Direction and AQuESTT feature assessment as a critical component of supporting teaching and learning and ensuring that all Nebraska students graduate high school ready for postsecondary education, career, and civic opportunities.

As part of these systems and Nebraska’s ESSA plan, NSCAS provides formative and interim assessments that help inform instructional processes and accelerate student learning toward College and Career Ready standards. NSCAS also provides summative assessments that measure student achievement against grade-level expectations. Professional learning, provided by schools, districts, and NDE, helps teachers use data from all of these assessments to inform instructional decisions and improve student outcomes.

To learn more about NSCAS, visit <https://www.education.ne.gov/assessment/nscas-system/>.