

**NSCAS Frequently Asked Questions  
2019-2020**

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 reading, language usage, 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 5 & 8) 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. **Will we administer a new assessment for science in spring 2020?**

Yes. The NSCAS General Summative for science will be a new assessment for the Nebraska College and Career Ready Standards for Science (NCCRS-S). It will be administered to all students in grades 5 and 8 in spring 2020. This is a field test that will help us “test out” the new assessment, so results will not be reported to districts or the general public. The field test will help inform our transition to the operational test for NCCRS-S in spring 2021.

1. **When will the 2020 NSCAS General Summative assessment results be available?**  
   Preliminary NSCAS General Summative scores (scale scores and performance levels) for ELA and mathematics will be available to districts within approximately 48 hours. These results are preliminary only. Psychometric checks will need to be conducted before the results are shared publicly. No results will be reported for science, because students in grades 5 and 8 will take a field test for NCCRS-S that will inform Nebraska's transition to the operational test that will be administered for science in 2021.
2. **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.
3. **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.
4. **Will you administer the NSCAS-ACT to students in their third year cohort of high school again in 2020?**Yes. The NSCAS ACT will be given again to all third-year cohort Nebraska high school students in 2020 to assess performance in English language arts, math, and science. The NSCAS ACT reflects higher expectations and provides more postsecondary opportunities, as third-year cohort 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.
5. **What is the difference between 2019 ACT** **scores for Nebraska’s graduating class and the 2019 NSCAS ACT scores?**The average ACT scores for Nebraska graduates released by ACT in October 2019 are based on the scores of 2019 graduates only. In other words, they are based on the ACT performance of graduates who took the exam as third-year cohort high school students (typically juniors) in the spring of 2018 as part of NSCAS, *or* on their performance if they retook the exam the following year in 2019. In contrast, the 2019 NSCAS ACT scores scheduled for release in December 2019 by NDE are only for students who took the exam as third-year cohort high school students in spring 2019 and will graduate in the spring of 2020.
6. **Can the average ACT scores for 2019 Nebraska graduates be compared to 2018 NSCAS ACT scores? What about 2019 NSCAS ACT scores?**An apples-to-apples comparison between average ACT scores for 2019 graduates and 2018 NSCAS ACT scores cannot be made, as not all students who took the exam in 2018 as third-year cohort high school students retook it in 2019. In addition, a comparison cannot be made between the average ACT scores of 2019 Nebraska graduates and 2019 NSCAS ACT scores because these scores measure the performance of two different groups of students (2019 seniors for the former, and 2019 third-year cohort students, typically juniors, for the latter).
7. **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.
8. **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.
9. **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.

1. **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/>.

1. **Why is Nebraska planning to transition to the NSCAS adaptive through-year model?**

NSCAS was developed to support the connection between curriculum, instruction, and assessment. It includes formative, interim, and summative (proficiency) measures, with the recognition that educators need different types of data to inform teaching and learning.

The goal from day one has been to make assessment more useful in the classroom, so NDE has been working with Nebraska districts to increase the instructional relevance of summative data and reduce the challenges teachers and students face in managing both interim and summative tests.

As part of this effort, in 2021-22, Nebraska districts will transition to an adaptive, through-year assessment model for grades 3–8 in English language arts and mathematics. NSCAS through-year assessment combines the best of MAP® Growth™ and the NSCAS General Summative test to reduce overall testing and provide better data during the year to support learning.

In 2020-2021, Nebraska districts will administer modified versions of MAP Growth and the NSCAS General Summative to support initial research studies required to transition to the NSCAS adaptive through-year model in 2021-22.

To learn more, please review the [October 2019 Regional Workshop presentation](https://cdn.education.ne.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Regional-Workshop.pptx).