



## AKS Assessment Program— High School Gateway

*The Gateway tests are one way Gwinnett schools measure student learning of the school system’s curriculum— the Academic Knowledge and Skills or AKS. The high school Gateway assesses students’ language arts, science, and social studies knowledge and skills. As the parent of a high school student, you may have questions about this test, which your child must pass to earn a regular Gwinnett County high school diploma. Here are answers to some frequently asked questions.*

### Who takes the high school Gateway?

The high school Gateway is given for the first time in 10th grade. Students must pass all sections to earn a regular Gwinnett County high school diploma. Students new to Gwinnett also are required to take and pass the test before earning a regular high school diploma.

### What kind of test is it?

Students write two essays— one on a science topic and one on a social studies topic. In writing his response, a student must use his own knowledge about the topic and pull information from documents that are provided. The essays are rated in four areas— science knowledge and concepts, language arts/writing skills on the science topic, social studies knowledge and concepts, and language arts/writing skills on the social studies topic.

### How does a student prepare for the test and what are its benefits?

The skills and knowledge students acquire in their classes prepare them for the Gateway. Their classwork and homework in various subject areas includes a lot of writing and focuses on the kind of writing they’ll find on the test. Students also take tests in class that are in a Gateway format, so they know what to expect at Gateway time. The teaching and learning that prepares students for this test also prepares them for the future by providing the knowledge and communication skills most colleges and businesses say are critical for today’s graduates.

### When will students take the test and how much time will they have to finish it?

For 2004–05, the social studies test will be given on April 19 with a make-up on April 20. The science essay will be written on April 21 with the make-up on April 25. Students have about two hours to write each of the essays— one essay per day.

### What does a student have to score on the high school Gateway to pass?

The cut score— or passing score— was recommended by Gwinnett teachers and adopted by the School Board.

Students must earn a passing score in each of the four areas to pass the test.

Subtests	Range of Possible Scores	Required Passing Score/ Performance Level	% of Students Who Passed in 2004 on First Try
<b>Science</b>	20–120	58 or above	70.1%
<b>Language Arts in Science</b>	22–132	70 or above	87.2%
<b>Social Studies</b>	20–120	60 or above	85.3%
<b>Language Arts in Social Studies</b>	22–132	70 or above	87.1%

*Note: These are raw scores. It is not appropriate to convert them to percentages.*

2004-05 School Year

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## **AKS Assessment Program— High School Gateway, continued**

### **How is the high school Gateway scored?**

The tests are scored by Gwinnett teachers who have been specially trained. Each essay is scored by at least two people. Each rater reads the paper and analyzes the student’s knowledge and skills in language arts/writing, and in science or social studies. Scores fall into four ranges. In addition to the Below Minimal/Failing range (which includes all scores below the cut score), there are three passing ranges: Minimal, Effective, and Excellent. The majority of students will score in the passing range; however, our goal is to help more students score in the Effective and Excellent ranges.

**The following are examples of the features found in “passing” papers at the different performance levels.**

	<b>Minimal</b>	<b>Effective</b>	<b>Excellent</b>
<b>Language Arts</b> (Students will earn two Language Arts scores — one for the science essay and one for the social studies essay.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Includes most required AKS skills</li><li>• Lacks flow, but the intent can be determined</li><li>• Includes a definite introduction, body, and conclusion</li><li>• Constructs adequate paragraphs and sentences</li><li>• Uses simple words</li><li>• Has errors in grammar, punctuation, and spelling, but they distract the reader very little</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Includes all required AKS skills</li><li>• Uses sufficient examples to support ideas</li><li>• Uses effective sentences and appropriate vocabulary</li><li>• Has no run-on sentences, and sentence fragments are rare</li><li>• Organizes paper in a manner that does not distract the reader</li><li>• Has few spelling, grammatical, or punctuation errors</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrates exceptional knowledge of AKS writing skills</li><li>• Organizes paper well and has a clearly defined focus</li><li>• Uses extensive vocabulary and varied sentence structure to engage reader</li><li>• Has few (if any) mechanical errors</li></ul>
<b>Science and Social Studies</b> (Students will earn one score for science and one for social studies.)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Demonstrates a limited understanding of the concept or topic</li><li>• Refers to the documents provided, but fails to show full understanding of the information/concept</li><li>• Uses concepts, principles, and ideas correctly, but does not clearly explain</li><li>• Uses charts and graphs correctly, for the most part</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Shows adequate understanding of the concept or topic</li><li>• Exhibits prior knowledge</li><li>• Uses documents correctly</li><li>• Connects examples to the topic</li><li>• Demonstrates a varied subject - area vocabulary, which is used appropriately</li><li>• Refers to charts and graphs correctly</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Uses extensive prior knowledge and documents correctly</li><li>• Exhibits subject knowledge clearly and correctly</li><li>• Demonstrates a depth of understanding</li><li>• Provides explanations and examples, indicating a clear understanding of the AKS</li><li>• Uses subject area concepts and vocabulary extensively</li><li>• Uses and interprets charts and graphs correctly</li></ul>

### **When will parents learn how their child did on the test?**

Results from the high school Gateway taken in April are mailed to parents in the fall.

### **What if a student does not pass the high school Gateway?**

Few students fail the Gateway because it measures what students learn and practice every day in the classroom. A student who does not pass the first time will have several opportunities to retake the Gateway before his or her scheduled graduation date. The student continues to take the normal sequence of courses, earning credits toward graduation. However, the student must pass the Gateway to earn a regular Gwinnett diploma. To help students prepare for the Gateway retest, extra instruction is available through classes offered at the school, or online.

### **Does a student simply have to pass the high school Gateway in order to earn a regular Gwinnett diploma?**

No. In order to earn a regular Gwinnett County high school diploma, students must:

- ◆ Learn the AKS to pass each class and earn the necessary Carnegie units.
- ◆ Pass Gwinnett’s high school Gateway, which is first administered in the 10th grade.
- ◆ Pass the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (content-area subtests and writing test), which are administered in the 11th grade.

**If you have additional questions, talk to a teacher, counselor, or administrator at your child’s school.**