

Graduation Requirements: 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 is a writing test that 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.

(See the flyer about the Georgia High School Graduation Tests and the Georgia High School Writing Test to learn more about these additional state graduation requirements.)



Who takes the high school Gateway?

Most students take the high school Gateway 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 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 a response, students must use their own knowledge about the topic and incorporate 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?

What are its benefits?

The skills and knowledge students acquire in their classes prepare them for the Gateway. Classwork and homework in various subject areas provide focus and practice in the kind of writing that will be on the test. Students also take tests in class that mirror the Gateway format. This experi-

ence exposes students to the important content knowledge and writing skills that colleges and businesses expect of today's graduates. In addition, the SAT college-admissions test and Advanced Placement (AP) exams require essays.

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

For 2010–11, students will write the science essay on April 18 and the social studies essay on April 20. Students have about two hours to write each of the essays—one essay per day.

When will parents learn how their student did on the test?

For students who take the test in April, results will be available before the end of the school year.

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

The 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. See the ranges for the levels of performance and the required passing scores in the chart below.

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High School Gateway Subtests	Ranges for Levels of Performance				Required Passing Score
	Does Not Meet AKS Performance	Minimal AKS Performance	Effective AKS Performance	Excellent AKS Performance	
Science	20–57	58–79	80–103	104–120	58 or above
Language Arts in Science	22–69	70–91	92–123	124–132	70 or above
Social Studies	20–59	60–79	80–105	106–120	60 or above
Language Arts in Social Studies	22–69	70–91	92–123	124–132	70 or above

2010–11 School Year

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

How is the high school Gateway scored?

The tests are scored by the Georgia Center for Assessment. All raters have been specially trained to score the Gateway. 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 passing 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. In the table above, you will find examples of the features found in “passing” papers at different performance levels.

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

Most students pass 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, with resources posted to the GCPS website.

Does a student simply have to pass the High School Gateway to earn a regular Gwinnett diploma?

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

- ◆ Meet attendance requirements;
- ◆ Learn the AKS to pass needed classes and earn the state-required credits/units;
- ◆ Take state-required End of Course Tests in designated courses;
- ◆ Pass Gwinnett’s High School Gateway, which most students take for the first time in the 10th grade; and
- ◆ Pass the Georgia High School Graduation Tests (four subject-area subtests) and the Georgia High School Writing Test, which are administered in the 11th grade.



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