2016 Score Release

* The results released today include the CMAS tests in English language arts, math, science and social studies, along with the PSAT and ACT. Together, these assessments let students, parents and educators know -- every step of the way -- if students are meeting grade-level expectations and are on track for college or careers.
* Overall participation in the tests has stabilized. Participation rates are about the same as last year for grades 3 through 8, and we saw a slight increase in participation in 9thgrade and very strong participation in the PSAT and ACT. We encourage parents, community members and the media to always consider participation rates when reviewing achievement results.
* I am proud of the hard work being done in classrooms in Colorado. We are seeing some areas of improvements in the second year of our math and English language arts assessments, but it is too early to draw conclusions about long-term trends. It is clear, however, that we must continue to work together to ensure that all of our students are mastering our academic standards designed to prepare students for life after high school.
  + Grades 3 through 5 improved in math over the previous year
  + Hispanic students’ showed a five-year high on ACT
* These tests are aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards and are the only common academic measurement for all students in Colorado. Still, the tests are just one measure of student achievement, and parents should remember that these tests, along with classroom grades and teacher feedback, create a more complete picture of a student’s academic achievement.
* We’ve said all along that adjusting to the higher expectations of our Colorado Academic Standards would take time. Last year, we set a new baseline for our kids. We are seeing some areas of improvement, but overall, performance is relatively stable in this second year of CMAS testing, and that gives us a strong benchmark from which we will measure future success.
* We’re excited to be releasing PSAT and ACT scores at the same time as our CMAS scores, because together they create a full continuum of information about whether our students are on track for college or careers. As we move toward our first administration of the SAT next year, we want to make sure students, parents and educators are fully aware of the free test prep services and college applications that are now available to all Colorado students.

How are the test scores used?

* Along with grades and feedback from teachers, the test scores help parents understand if their children are ready for the next grade level and on track to succeed in college and careers. The scores also let parents see how well their children did in comparison to peers in their school, district and the state.
* Resources to help parents understand what their student’s test results mean and how they can be used to support their student's academic success are available at: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/resourcesforparents>
* The achievement and growth results are used in Colorado’s accountability system for measuring how well schools and districts are doing, along with post-secondary and workforce readiness indicators.
* Growth on test scores are just one of several measures considered in evaluations of teachers.
* The state, schools and districts use these results in their improvement planning process. The state level results provide valuable information about the overall system and programs, where there are areas of strengths and where there is room for improvement.

How can the test scores help my child improve?

* The score report helps you understand whether your child is meeting grade-level expectations and whether he or she is on track for college and careers. The report has been broken down to reflect where your child is doing well or needs more practice.
* Parents can use their student’s scores to identify specific areas of strength and areas that need improvement. Use the scores as a discussion guide with your child and/or child’s teacher around additional supports that can help your child succeed. The scores can also help parents focus learning time at home in the areas that most need improvement.
* The information can be used to guide instruction so teachers can provide additional support or more challenging work when needed.
* Voluntary, optional and free practice resources for PSAT10 and SAT include Khan Academy, practice paper tests, a daily practice app, and a partnership with the Boys and Girls Club. In addition, students are provided connections to scholarship providers, access to online college and career planning tools, and feedback to support opportunities for rigorous coursework.
* Through the review of assessment results in the improvement planning process, schools and districts will be better able to adjust their programs to make sure the needs of their students are being met. For example, a school may learn they have not given as much attention to algebraic structures in the math standards, and can adjust their program to ensure students receive that instruction.

Guidance in interpreting results

* Two years of data is not enough to identify trends. Given the mostly stable results, we can be assured of a strong foundation as we move forward with our efforts to increase student achievement.
* Small changes from year to year should not be overemphasized. It is a continuous improvement trend that we are seeking. 2016 high school math scores cannot be compared to 2015 scores because 10th, 11th and 12th grade students were not tested in 2016. The 2016 results only represent 9th graders who took the specific course work. You may see larger changes in some of the disaggregated results, specifically for groups with smaller numbers of students. Remember, in all data, the smaller the number of records included, the more likely it is to see larger changes and more “extreme” results year to year.

Background on the tests

* Last spring students in grades 3 through 9 took state tests in math and English language arts. Students in grades 5, 8 and 11 took science tests, and a sampling of students in grades 4 and 7 took social studies tests. Students in 10th grade took the PSAT 10 and 11th-graders took the ACT. (This year’s 11th-graders will take the SAT as the state’s college-entry test).
* The tests are aligned with the Colorado Academic Standards, and they match the content taught in the classroom every day. They are designed to measure real-world skills, like critical thinking, problem solving and writing – skills that will prepare students for success in college and career.
* The Colorado Academic Standards were developed by Colorado educators and fully implemented in the 2013-14 school year.
* The tests were designed to assess higher order thinking skills and to be given online, although the opportunity to use a paper version of the test was offered to all school districts in 2016.
* The tests include multiple choice questions as well as questions that asked student to analyze different sources of information and write well-organized essays. You can see a practice exam at <https://parcc.pearson.com/practice-tests/>.

Where can I learn more?

* www.cde.state.co.us/communications/superintendentandprincipaltools
* www.cde.state.co.us/communications