

DROP-IN ARTICLE

Colorado Assessments and Participation

A resource for parents and educators

Superintendents or Principals to Parents

*Use this entire article or just portion of it to communicate with parents about the purpose of assessments and the value of participation.*

Our third- through ninth-graders soon will begin taking the statewide assessments that are aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards and measure real world skills like problem solving, communicating and thinking critically -- skills that are critical to success in college and careers for the 21st Century. These assessments, called the Colorado Measures of Academic Success tests, examine students’ knowledge in English language arts, math, science and social studies and will be given over a three-week window between April 10 and April 28.

It is important to understand that our overall goal is to ensure that all students are prepared for college or careers when they leave high school. These tests provide a snapshot of how our students are progressing toward that goal and how our teachers can better help them achieve it. The tests are aligned to the work already being done in the classroom and the results can help teachers improve or modify their instruction to meet the child. We’ll get the results of this year’s tests back much sooner so that teachers can put the information to use.

It is also important to remember that these tests are just one measure of a student’s progress, but they are the only common measurement across the state that helps parents understand how their children are doing compared with their peers around the state, how the school is performing and how the district is doing overall. The information from the tests also helps policymakers identify what schools or districts need help or which ones should be celebrated for their successes.

But the information is only good if students take the assessments. In the not-so-distant past, students were graduating without the skills necessary to be prepared for college or careers. Students, parents and educators were shocked at the results or the remedial classes that were necessary to bring college freshmen up to speed.

Current assessments are designed to help reveal how students are progressing toward that goal. But the information won’t be there if students don’t take the tests. In recent years, the state has worked to reduce the number and length of tests for our students in an effort to answer the call from parents who were unhappy about the overload.

Last year, we introduced the PSAT 10 for 10th-graders to replace the CMAS tests for that grade and participation increased. This year, 11th-graders will be the first to take the SAT as the state’s college entrance exam.

This spring’s tests will inform parents on what their children know, empowering families with knowledge and information to ensure their children get the best education possible. But it can only happen if students take the tests. Perhaps the best way to understand what the tests are all about is [to take a practice test](http://www.cde.state.co.us/assessment/cmaspracticetest).