



## Colorado Measures of Academic Success

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### Overview

Colorado assessments are changing to accurately assess student mastery of the updated Colorado Academic Standards. This guide can help districts communicate accurately and consistently about Colorado's new tests – Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS). The CMAS include both the new Colorado-developed science and social studies assessments (administered for the first time in elementary and middle schools in spring 2014) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers - (PARCC) developed English language arts and math assessments (replaced TCAP assessments in spring 2015).

The CMAS tests establish a new baseline of expected student learning. It is important to communicate with teachers, parents and other stakeholders to prepare for the changes associated with using the new assessments.

This resource is focused on assessment messages, but also includes messages about the new standards. Standards and assessment go hand-in-hand: good instruction based on standards and assessment of student learning cannot occur in isolation of one another. Each informs the other, and they become an intentional system that guides measurable student learning and achievement.

This resource includes:

- Assessment elevator speech
- Foundational messages
- Supporting messages broken out by topic

These messages may be adapted to meet audience needs and used for any type of communication including presentations, newsletters to staff, websites and trainings.

Assessment messages targeted to the parent audience (higher-level) can be found on the CDE website:

[www.cde.state.co.us/communications/superintendentandprincipaltools-assessments](http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/superintendentandprincipaltools-assessments)

### Contents

- [Elevator speech](#)
- [Background messages: WHY new standards and assessments?](#)
- [Key messages for educators](#)
- [Implementation timeline](#)
- [Message themes](#)
  - [New vs. old assessments](#)
  - [Cost of assessments](#)
  - [Testing time](#)
  - [NEW scores](#)
  - [Technology](#)



## Elevator Speech: 30-second overview

Colorado has adopted higher expectations for what our students should know and be able to do at each grade level. Called the Colorado Academic Standards, these updated learning expectations will prepare students for the next stage of their lives. In addition, we have new tests to measure how students, schools and districts are doing in meeting the higher expectations. These new online assessments, called the Colorado Measures of Academic Success, use more advanced questioning and performance tasks to enable students to demonstrate the critical thinking, analytical writing and problem solving skills needed to succeed in today's world.

## Main Points: Why New Standards and Assessments?

- Previous standards were 20 years old, leaving students unprepared for realities of today's more advanced jobs and workplace.
- The new standards reflect updated expectations of what students must know and be able to do to be prepared for college and career.
- New standards require new assessments to measure student mastery of the learning expectations.

## Key Messages

- **Previous standards were more than 20 years old and not on course to prepare students for success after high school.**
  - Students deserve to graduate from high school fully prepared to meet the academic challenges of college and careers.
    - Yet, according to the Colorado Department of Higher Education's 2013 Legislative Report on Remedial Education:
      - Thirty-seven percent of students in the Colorado high school graduating class of 2012 who enrolled in a state public college or university either needed remediation or enrolled in a remedial course in at least one academic subject.
      - Sixty-five percent of students enrolled in a two-year college and 20 percent of students at a four-year institution needed remediation.
      - Most students required remediation in math (47 percent), followed by writing (31 percent) and reading (21 percent).
      - The estimated cost associated with remedial courses was approximately \$56 million in 2012-13. Of that total, \$38 million was billed in student tuition while the state funded \$19 million.
  - According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress:
    - Only 50 percent of Colorado students are proficient in 4th grade math
    - Only 42 percent of Colorado students are proficient in 8th grade math
    - Only 41 percent of Colorado students are proficient in 4th grade reading
    - Only 40 percent of Colorado students are proficient in 8th grade reading

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

- **Colorado is raising the bar to ensure all students receive a world-class education.**
  - The world has changed. The careers of today and tomorrow value postsecondary education and training more than ever.
  - By 2020, 74 percent of Colorado's jobs will require education beyond high school, according to the Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce.
  - As our world changes and the expectations for schools change, our academic standards must keep pace. By continually improving our education system, we give students the knowledge and skills they need to have more options in life and their career after high school.
  - The Colorado Academic Standards are critical to the business community because they are designed to prepare students for today's more advanced jobs and workplace. Expectations for all levels of jobs today have increased compared to years past.
- **Previous assessments did not measure essential skills.**
  - Challenging standards require updated assessments that measure students' knowledge of these expectations. The assessments also provide teachers with the critical information they need to help students succeed. It's a package deal designed to better prepare students for college and careers.
  - Previous assessments measured outdated standards; updated assessments focus on clearer and more rigorous standards.
  - Previous assessments didn't have the advantage of using technology to include more interactive/multi-part questions, performance-based tasks and simulations.
  - The new assessments are more representative of the kinds of tasks and environments students will encounter after high school.
- **New tests provide teachers with meaningful information.**
  - Assessments provide valuable instructional information, letting teachers know how their students are performing and where to amplify their instruction.
  - The improved assessments present a more complete and accurate picture of what students have learned.
  - Teachers have been involved in every phase of developing the new standards and assessments; their direct classroom experience has informed both the new standards and assessments.
  - PARCC, the collaboration of states working together to develop tests for English language arts and math, plans to release test items from its assessments when scores are released. This will create transparency and give teachers samples that can help improve classroom instruction.
- **Schools across Colorado have been using the standards since 2013-14.**
  - **Standards:** Colorado adopted the Colorado Academic Standards in 2009. In December 2010, Colorado adopted revised reading, writing and communicating standards and math standards with embedded Common Core State Standards. All Colorado districts fully implemented the standards in 2013-14.
  - **CMAS in science and social studies tests:** Field testing was conducted in the spring and fall of 2013 and full administration occurred in the spring of 2014.
  - **CMAS in English language arts and math tests:** Field testing was conducted in the spring of 2014 and full administration occurred in the 2014–15 school year.

[Return to Table of Contents](#)

- **New tests provide more insight into student learning.**
  - The new Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) assessments are computer-based, interactive, engaging and will be more effective measurement tools than paper-and-pencil tests.
  - The CMAS tests in English language arts and math, developed by PARCC, have two parts including a performance-based portion and an end-of-year portion. The performance-based portion will be administered about three-quarters of the way into the year and is designed to measure critical-thinking and problem-solving skills that are foundational components of the improved academic standards. The end-of-year portion will be administered near the end of the school year.
  - The computer-based assessments will ask students to answer a variety of types of questions, show their work and explain their reasoning. They will assess critical-thinking and problem-solving skills in an in-depth manner.
    - In math, for example, students won't just follow procedures, but will demonstrate their understanding of the math behind their answers. They also require students to accurately select the best mathematical concept or equation to solve real-world problems, while demonstrating why the method or equation they selected is accurate.
    - In reading, writing and communicating, assessment questions are designed to ensure students fully comprehend what they read and can effectively talk and write about it. They are also asked to apply that understanding to make arguments and examine the logic of others – skills needed to succeed in K–12, college, and beyond — regardless of their career path.
    - Questions on the new assessments will ask students to back up their answers with information from texts instead of just offering their opinions.
    - The English language arts tests will assess writing skills at every grade level.
  - The new assessments will provide meaningful data for all students, including high- and low-performing students.
    - Teachers and families will get detailed reports, helping them better understand each child's mastery of the standards and what additional support or enrichment he might need.
  - The collaboration with other states through PARCC allows our state to benchmark student progress on a broader scale – comparing results with states and districts across the country.
- **Participation in CMAS will tell us if students, schools and districts are on track.**
  - Strong participation in the CMAS is critical to understanding whether students are on track to graduate college and career ready.
- **CMAS replaces the TCAP and takes about the same amount of time.**
  - The updated English language arts, math and science assessments replace TCAP assessments. They are not additional assessments. The testing time for each student for the new assessments is comparable to time spent on TCAP. The social studies tests were added in spring 2014 as required by state law.
  - The time students spend on assessments provides useful information indicating if students are on track for college and career, and it gives parents peace of mind, letting them know how their child is doing in school.
  - Finding the right balance of instruction to testing is important. The Colorado Legislature is engaging educators, parents and experts in this conversation in the 2015 session.

- **New scores will redefine what it means to be proficient based on new standards.**
  - As Colorado transitions to improved academic standards, updated assessments are required to more accurately measure student mastery of the standards. New assessments bring a new baseline of student learning (*new scores*).
  - We are raising the bar and holding our students to the higher standards they will need to succeed in an increasingly competitive world.
  - Scores from the old TCAP assessments are not comparable to scores from the new CMAS assessments. They are different assessments measuring different standards; a new baseline of student learning will be established.
  - The new assessments measure deeper knowledge and skills that are particularly important for students' futures, including problem-solving, writing and critical thinking.
  - The new scores provide more accurate reflections of what students know and can do.
- **Cost of the CMAS is about the same as previous tests.**
  - The new assessments are worth taking. They measure critical thinking, writing and the ability to use information to solve real-world problems.
  - The costs of the updated assessments are on-par with the costs of previous assessments in Colorado. The new assessments however, engage students in an online format more closely aligned with the expectations and functionality of our more technology-based world.
  - Colorado is committed to using the highest quality assessments possible so we can accurately measure the degree to which students are on track toward success after high school.
    - At a time when budgets are stretched, cost is a concern; however, access to a digitally ready classroom is not a privilege, it's a necessity if we are going to ensure our students have the tools necessary to be college and career ready.
- **Computer-based assessments more completely measure students' knowledge.**
  - The new assessments are built on a computer system that students can readily learn and use. Schools will be able to use a range of devices from desktop computers to laptops and tablets – the same technology required in today's colleges and workplace.
  - Technology-enhanced assessment items can more completely measure the full range of students' depth of knowledge and critical thinking skills.
  - With online assessments, accommodations and embedded supports can be delivered virtually and consistently rather than in-person.
  - The computer-based assessments will ask students to answer a variety of more relevant types of questions, show their work, and explain their reasoning.