

New Assessments Key Messages: Parent Audience

Overview

Colorado tests are changing to accurately measure student mastery of the updated Colorado Academic Standards. These key messages can help districts and educators communicate accurately and consistently about Colorado's new assessments – Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) in English language arts, math, science and social studies.

The new CMAS tests establish a new baseline of expected student learning. It will be important to prepare for how to appropriately interpret the new proficiency scores associated with the new tests.

This resource is focused on assessment messaging, but also includes messages about 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
- Main points
- 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 parents and websites.

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 Tests?

- Previous standards were more than 20 years old, leaving students unprepared for the 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 tests to measure students' mastery of the expectations.



Key Messages

Previous standards were more than 20 years old and not on course to prepare students for success after high

- Students deserve to graduate from high school fully prepared to meet the academic challenges of college and careers, but according to the Colorado Department of Higher Education's 2013 Legislative Report on Remedial Education:
 - 37 percent of students in Colorado's high school graduating class of 2012 were required to enroll in at least one remedial course in college
 - 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 funding share was \$19 million.

Colorado is raising the bar to ensure all students receive a world-class education.

- o The world has changed. The careers of today and tomorrow value postsecondary education and training more than ever.
- o 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 in their career after high school.
- The Colorado Academic Standards are critical to the business community because they were designed to prepare students with the skills for today's more advanced jobs and workplace, tomorrow, including the ability to communicate effectively, apply math to real-world situations, critically analyze literature and informational texts, and demonstrate problem-solving techniques.

Previous tests did not measure essential skills.

- Challenging new standards require tests that measure students' knowledge of these expectations. The tests 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 tests measured old standards; updated tests focus on clearer and more rigorous standards.
- Previous tests didn't have the advantage of using technology to include more interactive/multi-part questions, performance-based tasks and simulations.
- o The new tests are more representative of the kinds of tasks and environments students will encounter after high school.

New tests provide parents with greater insight on students' progress.

- Based on Colorado's updated standards, the new tests give parents peace of mind, letting them know how their child is performing and growing over time and how that compares to his/her peers.
- Higher standards and aligned tests to measure learning along the way will help you and your child make informed choices throughout your child's schooling, helping pave the way to colleges and careers.

CMAS will give policymakers insight into school performance and true workforce development.

- The tests provide confidence, letting you and your business and community constituents know public schools are doing their job.
- Having comparable results across states will allow you to see how well your education system measures up and if tax dollars are invested most effectively.



Schools across Colorado have been using the standards since 2013-14.

- 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.
- 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.
- 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.

The tests will provide much more insight into student learning.

- The new CMAS tests are computer-based, interactive and engaging and will be more effective measurement tools than paper-and-pencil tests.
- The computer-based tests 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 mathematics behind them. They also require students to understand concepts, not just memorize answers, and accurately select the best mathematical concept or equation to solve real-world problems, and explain why the method or equation they selected is accurate.
 - In reading, writing, and communicating, test questions are designed to ensure that students fully comprehend what they read and can effectively talk and write about it. They also ask students to apply that understanding to make arguments and examine the logic of others – skills needed to succeed in K-12, college and beyond.
- The new tests 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 or she might need.
- Individual questions from the CMAS tests in math and English language arts will be released when scores are announced. This will create transparency and give teachers samples that can help improve instruction.

CMAS will replace existing tests.

- o CMAS are not additional tests they will replace the old TCAP, and they are designed to provide students, parents and educators with more meaningful feedback to help us ensure students master the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in today's world.
- Quality tests provide useful information indicating if students are on track for college and career. This integral feedback leads to higher quality instruction and improves student learning.
- 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.

CMAS costs are similar to previous tests.

- The costs of the updated tests are on par with the costs of previous tests in Colorado. The new tests 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 tests 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 to ensure our students are ready for college and career.

New scores will redefine what it means to be proficient based on new standards.

CMAS will provide a more accurate understanding of student knowledge because students will be asked to show and apply what they know, instead of just picking the right answer form a multiple-choice question.



- The new assessments are not an apples-to-apples comparison to old tests, so previous scores cannot be weighed against new proficiency levels. CMAS raises the bar and measures students' progress toward the higher standards they will need to succeed in an increasingly competitive world.
- New technology decreases costs for schools and allows for better understanding of students knowledge
 - o The new tests are built on a computer system that is easy for students to learn and use. Schools will be able to use a range of devices from desktop computers to laptops and tablets – the same technology that students use in classrooms throughout the year and the same technology required in today's workplace and colleges.
 - o Technology-enhanced test items better measure the full range of students' grasp of knowledge and critical thinking skills.
 - Online tests offer a lower cost for schools to administer as there are no shipping and printing costs.