



The Role of State Assessments in Increasing Academic Achievement

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Colorado has a series of educational standards known as the Colorado Academic Standards that outline academic objectives for students in every grade across eight content areas, including math, English language arts and science. The standards create learning expectations for what students should understand, know and be able to do at each grade level and in each content area. The end-of-year assessments – Colorado Measures of Academic Success, or CMAS – measure students’ mastery of the standards and the complex thinking and other critical skills students need to be successful in school and in life. The data from assessments are critical in determining if educational goals are being met and if students are on track to graduate prepared for college and careers.

In the spring of 2022, students took the first full set of CMAS assessments since the pandemic. Students took a reduced set of tests in spring 2021, with third, fifth and seventh graders taking the English language arts tests; and fourth, sixth and eighth graders taking the math tests. Eighth graders also took the science tests in 2021 and 2022. Administration of the full set of CMAS assessments will provide a more complete picture of how students are performing following the disruptions and lost opportunities from the pandemic. Parents can use this information to see whether their students are meeting grade-level expectations laid out in the Colorado Academic Standards and whether they are on track for the next grade level.

Purpose and Value of State Assessments

CMAS and PSAT/SAT are the only common measuring tools for Colorado students. The tests measure real-world skills like problem-solving and critical thinking and are aligned to classroom work, so teachers don’t have to “teach to the test.” Instruction based on the standards is the best preparation.

“I want my son to graduate high school on time ready for college or a career, and one way to ensure I know that he is on this path is by taking the state exam.”

Maribel Banuelos

CMAS

While state assessments are only one measure of student learning, having all Colorado students take this set of assessments provides parents with answers to these important questions:

- Did my child meet the state standards?
- How is my child doing academically after the disruptions caused by the pandemic?
- Does my child need additional services and help?
- How well is my child doing compared to other students in the same grade?
- Which schools and districts perform best in preparing students for academic success?
- Which districts have the best performance on the state assessments for children with special needs?

Additionally, state assessment results provide:

- Information districts can use, in combination with other district information, to evaluate programs.
- Information educators need to help improve instruction.
- Identification of districts and schools that have struggling students, so help can be provided.
- Recognition of high-performing systems so others may learn from them.



Practice Items Help Students Be Ready

Parents are sometimes concerned that participating in these tests can cause anxiety in their child or that preparing for the tests takes away time from instruction. Because these tests are aligned to the Colorado Academic Standards and classroom instruction, they should not cause any more anxiety than any other tests students take. Also, practice items are available to help familiarize parents and students with test content and structure.

Here is an example of a CMAS Fourth Grade Math item in both English and Spanish:

The length of a rectangular room is 8 feet.
 The area of the room is 56 square feet.

What is the perimeter, in feet, of the room?
 Enter your answer in the box.

Un cuarto rectangular mide 8 pies de largo.
 El cuarto tiene un área de 56 pies cuadrados.

¿Cuánto mide el perímetro del cuarto, en pies?
 Escribe tu respuesta en el recuadro.

Fewer tests, with faster turnaround of results

Since the full set of CMAS exams was first administered in the 2014-15 school year, the legislature and the State Board of Education have made several changes to decrease the number of tests students take and to shorten the tests.

- High school students no longer take CMAS ELA and math, and instead take the PSAT and SAT college entrance assessments.
- The State Board of Education and CDE are committed to continuing to look for ways to provide test results to districts faster, and in recent years individual student results have been provided to districts in June with a full public release in August.

Parental excuse from participation

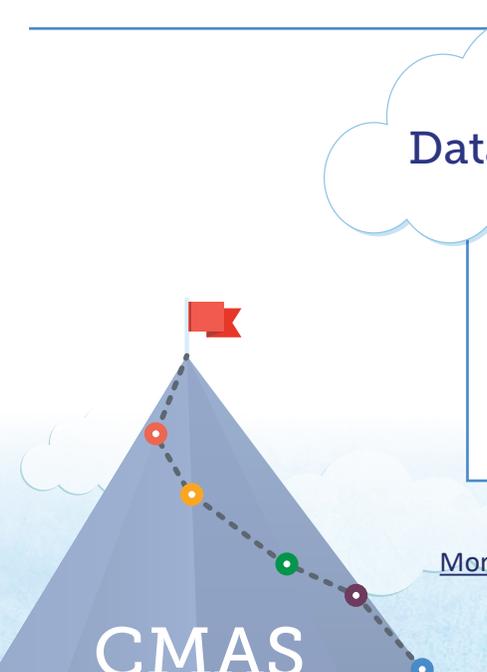
State law allows parents to excuse their children from taking state assessments. If a parent wants to excuse his or her child from participating in an assessment, the district is not allowed to impose negative consequences on the students or parents including prohibiting school attendance, imposing an unexcused absence, or prohibiting participation in extracurricular activities.

Likewise, districts cannot impose unreasonable burdens or requirements on a student to discourage the student from taking an assessment or to encourage the student's parent to excuse his/her child from the assessment. They must offer all students who are excused from testing the opportunity to participate in celebrations or incentives related to the assessments. Parents should know, however, that non-participation in state assessments means they will not have information on their child's attainment and growth on the state standards compared to other children.

Data Security

CDE is committed to ensuring that data on individual students are secure. The department has strict policies and procedures in place to maintain data security. For more information on data privacy and security, please go to <http://www.cde.state.co.us/dataprivacyandsecurity>.

[More information about practice resources is available on CDE's webpage.](#)



CMAS