**CMAS Will Provide Powerful Information**

I’m proud of the work we’ve done as a [district/school] to implement the new Colorado Academic Standards. The thought and planning required to rethink what and how we teach is a huge undertaking. But, this work is worth doing. Our students are being challenged in new and different ways and your efforts are instrumental in preparing students for the challenges they’ll face in tomorrow’s careers.

As we look toward this spring and the first administration of the new state tests in English language arts and math, collectively called the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS), I know there will be some apprehension about these new tests and what the scores reveal about student learning.

I agree that a change of this sort can be stressful and bring many questions, but I’m looking forward to the new tests. Here’s why:

1. The new assessments will provide a clearer understanding of student knowledge than previous tests because they ask students to show and apply what they know, instead of just picking the right answer from a multiple-choice question.
2. The new assessments reflect and reward instruction that is aligned to the learning goals of the standards and thus, eliminate “test prep” time. When we focus on the standards, we are in fact preparing students for the tests – and for success after high school graduation at the same time.
3. The new English language arts assessments give students the opportunity to engage with high-quality, complex, content-rich texts that include strong vocabulary, and require them to consistently use evidence in their responses.
4. While transitioning to online tests is a challenge (technology-wise and scheduling), this is a change worth making. Students today are digital natives and the jobs of today and tomorrow require using technology in one facet or another. Additionally, paper and pencil tests don’t typically engage students. If students aren’t engaged in the test, we aren’t assessing their full knowledge and skills.
5. We can become more familiar with the CMAS tests in English language arts and math by checking out online learning resources.

[PARCC Assessments Overview](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001eW-19s-cV8unwUA_jz-qbM_R406Lk4nPU521EoGgjMHpWlsG4hrWiX_IqosZNBrIWKDEB_XRrVc1HS5W-S6jqwCa-hXMB627tQ0SJjChia5s_P_dMYccEMgALI5UQfVCCiMOUiSficLNf-798bJRWYaFWJUkx1tqQTr3foYsgqrcdCEwI8Pdby85f04f1VLYruj-92sx7Vi1cVf0d431tKZNIbVwB3fBDjTbulzrvFIIBNiCYO0QNWcXig7OQKUAR9k13nEAZPKCRBZ2gp2eOtf6MPa-P1sbSh4YPfLTcXOd2C1oMbAz6FW6MlhGkN3lvs1xXhYhC1j1zyeampT68afeaZTR9AAEJv-q6o-xR7p-Qh5dWFZ6UVcPePTMjNoYTFTu5UYOcGVeVaoQeEyJ5oARvI3qPgBtgqS6WoaG2_wKXSNTAT3neftD-lR23zlYFqdxcEbH608CLmWyyYYihD4l9P00QvhIK_VK4aFWikOxkRGBd4SNwJSt_n28wCWv-SVQiwcpzzkauRKOhXfqEg==&c=m8USdZVdN7ERmE_F16QsyM_v3QRLefOjONAv_P8B4FdfT3vX-bwi0w==&ch=c25Ev-F0klvOSetd3xPr0wbUkzImsfFsLIf7vEKlWCZ8wlyjHOZ9pg==)

[PARCC Accessibility System](http://r20.rs6.net/tn.jsp?f=001eW-19s-cV8unwUA_jz-qbM_R406Lk4nPU521EoGgjMHpWlsG4hrWiX_IqosZNBrIxX5Wuz9OwMb8yFVn08hQRpOA6ByWWKN9GRInYouCWUGQRkl1_L4rgsdFgWPWNRDm5fZ5TH_w3Nq-H69TzGEbynBJ_XUV5DR1Io5rc9iSmEQJVsbQqrWgTxlkymy3oPgoUW78Zm69W9maJsqy4Ba5lpOajk5zGJgEagGtFy_f5zoRibZiUCqoD-pVTD8LPw-hjRek9INSKJwUs1XSGGy5FxgRrgEjuZwCC5z25tykxRSJT1MJb4f9eRljF__kG0AKfvTW_GTK56v215NYDnLhJa_sT7lVUUVCnBLog9K-yN-SY2QAOCJhYKwfQgft6HnW6o4Epp9AZEYxCZG1ZsT7xLWNszydhY5uJSU0ydA1ZhZgrYWurcpdZixeJTqid6w79EH466HvxcoA-zttkcBxPZYQ2_8TyR0Qi2Mj5qypnwqlbeK29kk101tDkQ8ElvZ7P6LvLqlFVxgHkaRBYq7BoA==&c=m8USdZVdN7ERmE_F16QsyM_v3QRLefOjONAv_P8B4FdfT3vX-bwi0w==&ch=c25Ev-F0klvOSetd3xPr0wbUkzImsfFsLIf7vEKlWCZ8wlyjHOZ9pg==)

1. Students can prepare for the new online tests by taking practice tests. By learning to navigate through the test and use the embedded supports in advance of the tests, they will have more confidence with the test. You can have students experience the tests on the PARCC website here:

[CMAS English language arts and math practice tests](http://parcc-test.pearson.com/practice-tests/)

I know there is trepidation about how students will perform on the new, more rigorous tests. I’ve heard fears about lower scores and questions about how this will be perceived by the public, affect evaluations and impact school/district ratings. If we see lower test scores, it does not mean we are performing worse or that students are learning less. Remember, the scores are measuring students’ mastery of new standards, and they are a point from which we will measure future growth and success.

Also, keep in mind that as we transition to the new tests this year, scores will not be used for any high stakes decisions, with one important exception – participation. Full participation from all students will be critical to understanding whether students are on track to graduate college and career ready. And, participation will be a factor in our school ratings and district accountability.

Additionally, a bill passed in the 2014 legislative session gives districts flexibility when determining how much weight the measures of student learning/outcomes standard counts in an educator’s final evaluation rating (including scores from CMAS). It’s important to note that full evaluations based on both professional practices and measures of student learning/outcomes must still be completed but at the end of the year when the two portions are combined for a final rating, districts have the ability to weight the measures of student learning/outcomes portion of the evaluation anywhere between 0-50 percent. In our district, we will be weighting the measures of student learning/outcomes at XX percent. [insert any specific information about the weight of the measures of student learning/outcomes in your district].

It will be important to communicate often with parents. We must help them understand the rigor of the new standards, how the standards provide the framework for student learning from grade-to-grade and the importance of measuring student learning along the way using new and aligned tests. Please encourage parents to learn more about the standards and the tests, and urge them to set a positive and productive tone at home around the importance of these tests.

Assessing learning throughout the year provides academic check-ins for all students and helps our teachers and school address gaps in learning.