Dear (Name of parents/guardian):

This spring our students will join students throughout Colorado in taking a new set of state tests called the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS). These are not additional tests – the CMAS replaces the TCAP, using next generation technology that will provide more meaningful feedback to help teachers and parents ensure students master the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in today’s world.

Many adults groan when we hear the word “tests,” recalling years of filling out bubble sheets and answering questions that didn’t seem to have any application in the real world. The new tests are completely online – no more bubble sheets – and they’ll give teachers and parents a more accurate picture of what our students have learned because they ask students to show and apply what they know, instead of just picking the right answer from a multiple-choice question.

The new tests are aligned with the Colorado Academic Standards, which replaced 20-year-old standards. The new standards, in use at our school since the 2013-14 school year, update our community’s expectations for what students must know to be ready for college level courses or a career after they graduate from high school.

You may have heard the new tests will be harder. As with any change, there will be a period of adjustment as teachers and students get used to the new standards and new tests. The new tests will, indeed, be different. We live in an increasingly complex world, and the knowledge and skills students need to succeed is challenging. By using more advanced questions, the CMAS tests will allow students to demonstrate their critical thinking, analytical writing and problem-solving skills.

Tests are not the most exciting part of learning, but they are an important part. Just as we take our children to the doctor for regular well-child checkups, these tests tell us how students and our schools are doing. Parents should know if their children are on the right path, and these new assessments will provide an “academic checkup” to help us know if our students are ready for what comes next.

We need your full participation in these tests. That means making sure your child gets a good night’s sleep and arrives to school on time. Just as the tests provide meaningful information about each student’s progress, the CMAS is a critical tool for reflecting on our work as a school. Strong participation is critical to understanding if our school is doing all it can to help our students prepare for success in college, a career and in life.

All schools in Colorado are required to test all students using the state’s tests. When students come to school during testing time, we’re expecting that students will participate in those tests. We are not able to provide alternative activities for students during that time.

Your child’s participation is really important to us.

If your child isn’t included in the testing, we won’t have a full picture of your child’s academic progress in relation to the state’s expectations. If your child misses the tests, you won’t have the academic growth information to best understand how he or she is progressing in meeting academic expectations for his/her grade level over time. That information also gives you beneficial insights about how much value our school is providing to your child, such as determining if we helped your child achieve at least a year’s worth of academic growth in a year’s time.

Our teachers also really value the information they get from the test results. Teachers can more clearly see if the school’s programs and classroom lessons are netting the results you expect. Having consistent, accurate and fair testing results allows us to measure our overall academic health of our school and district. It’s also a reliable gauge for taxpayers to account for the results of their public investment.

Without at least 95 percent of our students participating, our school’s rating will be lowered, potentially triggering increased requirements and oversight of our school’s improvement work by the state. The same kinds of consequences can impact our district if, as a district, we fall below that 95 percent participation rate. We risk our district’s accreditation and possibly federal funds.

I welcome the opportunity to visit with you further about our school’s process of testing and how we use the results to benefit your child and the rest of our student body. I respect your decision-making on your child’s education, and I look forward to working together to create the best and most useful educational experience for him/her.

Sincerely,

(Superintendent/Principal)