

## New Assessments Key Messages: *Parent Audience*

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### Overview

Colorado tests are changing in order to accurately measure student mastery of the updated Colorado Academic Standards. This messaging guidance can help districts communicate accurately and consistently about Colorado's new assessments – Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS). The CMAS include both the new Colorado-developed science and social studies tests (administered for the first time in elementary and middle schools spring 2014) and the PARCC-developed English language arts and mathematics assessments (replacing TCAP assessments in spring 2015).

The new CMAS tests establish a new baseline of expected student learning. While the improved English language arts and mathematics tests are more than a year away (spring of 2015), it is 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
- 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 parents and websites.

Assessment messaging targeted to the educator audience (more in depth) can be found on the CDE website: [www.cde.state.co.us/communications/superintendentandprincipaltools-assessments](http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/superintendentandprincipaltools-assessments)

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### 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 outline updated learning expectations to ensure students are well-prepared for the next stage of their lives. In addition, we have adopted new tests to measure how students, schools, and districts are doing in meeting the higher expectations. These new online assessments, the Colorado Measures of Academic Success, represent the next generation of student tests. By using more advanced questioning and performance tasks, they provide a snapshot of what students know in relation to the standards so teachers can best address each individual student's learning needs.

### Background Messages: Why Improved Standards and Tests?

- Previous standards were more than 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 tests to measure students' mastery of the expectations.

### More depth

- **Previous standards were about 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 careers post-secondary education.
    - Yet, according to the Colorado Department of Higher Education's 2012 Legislative Report on Remedial Education:
      - Forty percent of students in the Colorado high school graduating class of 2011 who enrolled in a state public college or university were either assessed as needing remediation or enrolled in a remedial course in at least one academic subject.
      - Sixty-six percent of students enrolled in a two-year college and 24 percent of students at a four-year institution needed remediation.
      - Most students required remediation in math (51 percent), followed by writing (31 percent) and reading (18 percent).
      - The estimated cost associated with remedial courses was approximately \$58 million in 2011-12. Of that total, \$39 million was billed in student tuition while the state funding share was \$19 million.
    - Estimates are that by 2020, 74 percent of Colorado's jobs will require education beyond high school, according to the Georgetown Center for Education and the Workforce.
  - According to the National Assessment of Educational Progress:
    - Only 50 percent of Colorado students are proficient in 4th grade mathematics
    - Only 42 percent of Colorado students are proficient in 8th grade mathematics
    - Only 41 percent of Colorado students are proficient in 4th grade reading
    - Only 40 percent of Colorado students are proficient in 8th grade reading

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- **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.
  - Sixty-seven percent of jobs will require a college degree by 2018. Students must graduate from high-school ready for college and beyond.
  - As our world changes and the expectations for schools change, our academic standards must keep pace. When we continually improve 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 for today's more advanced jobs and workplace. Expectations for all levels of jobs today have increased compared to years past.
  - The Colorado Academic Standards provide the necessary foundation upon which the rest of the education system is built.
- **Previous tests did not measure essential skills.**
  - Challenging new standards require next-generation 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.
  - The new tests are more representative of the kinds of tasks and environments students will encounter after high school.

## Messages for Parents and Policymakers

### Messaging for parents

- Based on Colorado's updated standards, the new tests give you peace of mind, letting you know how your 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 desired colleges and careers.

### Messaging for policymakers

- The improved tests provide confidence, letting you and your business and community constituents know public schools are doing their job.
- Higher standards and aligned tests will better prepare students for college, careers and life — and to compete in the 21st century economy.
- 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.

## Implementation Timeline

- **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 must implement the standards by the 2013-14 school year.

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- **Colorado-developed science and social studies tests:** Field testing was conducted in the spring and fall of 2013 and full administration occurs in the spring of 2014.
- **PARCC-developed English language arts and mathematics tests:** Field testing in the spring of 2014 and full administration is slated for the 2014–15 school year.

## Message Themes

### New vs. Old Tests

- Challenging new standards require next-generation tests that measure students' knowledge of the updated expectations. The Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) tests measure student mastery of the improved Colorado Academic Standards. 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.
- 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 will be asked students to apply what they've learned; 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, while demonstrating 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. The standards ask students to not only be able to understand what they read, but to also 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 tests will ask students to back up their answers with information from the text instead of just offering their opinions.
  - PARCC-developed tests will assess writing skills at every grade level.
- These tests are critical to economic development. They will assess the knowledge and skills all students need for the careers of tomorrow, including the ability to communicate effectively, apply math to real-world situations, critically analyze literature and informational texts, and demonstrate problem-solving techniques.
- 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 might need.
- PARCC plans to release items from its tests when scores are released. This will create transparency and give teachers samples that can help improve classroom instruction.
- States will be able to benchmark student progress on a broader scale – comparing results with states and districts across the country.

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### Cost of Tests

- The new tests are tests worth taking. They measure critical thinking, writing and the ability to use information to solve real-world problems.
- 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.
- The public is invested in schools and we need to measure what students are learning and if they are on track for success. We need to do that in a meaningful way.
- 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.

### Testing Time

- The time students spend on testing is purposeful; it provides teachers with critical feedback on the impact of their instruction and provides parents with peace of mind, letting them know how their child is doing in school.
- 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.
- The updated English language arts, mathematics and science tests replace TCAP tests, they are not additional tests. The testing time for each student for the new tests is comparable to time spent on TCAP.

### NEW Scores

- As Colorado transitions to improved academic standards, updated tests are required to more accurately measure student mastery of the standards.
- We are raising the bar and holding our students to the higher standards they will need to succeed in an increasingly competitive world.
- In 2014-15, TCAP tests for reading, writing and mathematics will be replaced by Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) tests for English language arts and mathematics.
- In short, improved standards require updated tests and new tests bring a new baseline of student learning (*new scores*).
- Scores from TCAP tests will not be comparable to scores from the new CMAS tests. They are different tests measuring different standards; a new baseline of student learning will be established.

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- The new tests measure deeper knowledge and skills that are particularly important for students' futures, including problem-solving, writing and critical thinking.
- The new scores provide more honest and accurate reflections of what students know and can do.

### Technology

- 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.
- 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.
- The computer-based tests will ask students to answer a variety of more relevant types of questions, show their work, and explain their reasoning.

### Impact on Accountability

- New academic standards require updated tests to measure students' learning. Results from state tests are used in school and district accountability ratings.
- The new state tests will provide fair and accurate measurements of schools' quality and performance.
- CDE is reviewing options to ensure that a fair system of continuous accountability is maintained throughout the transition period. More details are expected to be announced in early 2014.

### More Information

- Assessment FAQ: [www.cde.state.co.us/communications/factsheetsandfaqs-assessment](http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/factsheetsandfaqs-assessment)
- Messaging for Parents: [www.cde.state.co.us/communications/superintendentandprincipaltools-assessments](http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/superintendentandprincipaltools-assessments)
- Assessment Fact Sheets: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/factsheetsandfaqs-assessment>
- Standards Fact Sheets: [www.cde.state.co.us/communications/factsheetsandfaqs-standards](http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/factsheetsandfaqs-standards)
- Standards Messaging: [www.cde.state.co.us/communications/superintendentandprincipaltools-standards](http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/superintendentandprincipaltools-standards)

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