

# Colorado Measures of Academic Success

## The Transition to New State Assessments

Colorado assessments are changing in order to accurately assess student mastery of the new Colorado Academic Standards. With the standards being more focused, coherent and rigorous, assessments must adapt to align with them. The Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP) is being phased out and replaced by the Colorado Measures of Academic Success, the state's new English language arts, mathematics, science and social studies assessments.

### PARCC-Developed English Language Arts and Mathematics

Colorado is a governing member of a multi-state assessment consortium called the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). Involvement in this consortium allows the Colorado Department of Education staff, along with staff from the Colorado Department of Higher Education and Colorado educators, to collaborate with individuals from across the U.S. to develop assessments for English language arts and mathematics.

Beginning in the 2014-2015 school year, these new computer-based assessments will be administered in grades 3-11 for English language arts and in grades 3-8 with three high school assessments for mathematics. Assessments in each content area will be administered in two components: a performance-based assessment administered after approximately 75 percent of the school year and an end-of-year assessment administered **after 90 percent of the school year**.

### Colorado-Developed Science and Social Studies

New state science and social studies assessments measuring the Colorado Academic Standards were administered online in Colorado for the first time in the 2013-14 school year. These assessments are being developed collaboratively by the Colorado Department of Education, assessment contractor Pearson and Colorado educators. Elementary (4th grade social studies and 5th grade science) and middle school (7th grade social studies and 8th grade science) assessments were administered in the spring of 2014. High school (12th grade science and social studies) assessments will be administered in the fall of 2014.

### Frequently Asked Questions

#### Why do we have state assessments?

As part of a balanced assessment system, state assessments provide valuable information to students, families, schools, districts, the state and taxpayers. A

### State Assessment Timeline

#### 1997-2011: Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP)

- Measured student learning of the Colorado Model Content Standards (mathematics, reading, writing and science)

#### 2012-2013: Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP)

- Measured a blend of Colorado Model Content Standards and the new Colorado Academic Standards
- Allowed school districts to transition their instruction from the old standards to the new ones.

#### 2014: TCAP and Colorado Measures of Academic Success

- TCAP continues for reading, writing and math
- First year of new Colorado-developed science and social studies assessments

#### 2015: Colorado Measures of Academic Success

- First year of new PARCC-developed English language arts and math assessments
- Second year of science and social studies

balanced assessment system is one that contains formative assessments (quick checks for learning conducted by teachers throughout their class), interim assessments (more formal progress monitoring often conducted several times throughout the year to see how students are progressing) and summative assessments (end of course/unit, end of year assessments to find out what students know and can do).

The state assessments are summative assessments. While formative, interim and classroom-based summative assessments inform classroom instruction on a regular basis, state summative assessments are designed to be point-in-time snapshots of what students know and can do in core content areas. The assessment results are used by: parents/families to gauge student progress over time; teachers to inform and improve classroom practice and student placement; and by schools/districts to inform program, school and district improvement. The results are also the backbone of the state's accountability system. They are used to populate the annual school and district performance frameworks which result in accreditation ratings for each school and district. The results are also used for teacher evaluation purposes as one of the multiple measures required under S.B. 10-191. Changes in the assessment system have significant implications for the state's accountability and educator evaluation systems.

## **Are states required to administer state-wide assessments and what are the minimum requirements?**

States that accept federal funds for purposes such as supporting the education of children in poverty, English language learners and students with disabilities are required to administer state-wide assessments to all students. Currently, Colorado receives approximately \$326 million in federal funds for these and related purposes. The minimum required assessments are:

- Grades 3 through 8 for English language arts and mathematics
- At least once in high school for English language arts and mathematics
- At least once in elementary school, once in middle school and once in high school for science

For the assessments noted above, states must give the same assessments to all students and at least 95% of the students must participate in the tests. There are also some required assessments specific to certain populations of students (e.g., language proficiency assessments for English language learners).

## **How will Colorado's new assessment system compare to the federal minimum?**

Colorado's new state-wide summative assessment system, as outlined in state statute, includes the following assessments:

- Grades 3 through 11 for English language arts (above the federal minimum for high school)
- Grades 3 through 8 and three times in high school for math (above the federal minimum for high school)
- Once in elementary, middle and high school for science (at federal minimum)
- Once in elementary, middle and high school for social studies (no federal requirement)
- ACT in 11<sup>th</sup> grade (no federal requirement)

A key rationale from education practitioners and policymakers for having additional assessments at the high school level was based on the desire to have an early signal of whether students were on track to graduate college/career ready (the 9<sup>th</sup> grade assessments) and to then have an assessment that gave a closer approximation to their readiness (the 10<sup>th</sup> grade assessment) followed by the measure of college and career readiness accepted by colleges and universities, the 11<sup>th</sup> grade assessment. Social studies was added through feedback on the importance of this content area from practitioners, policymakers and the State Board of Education.

## **Are we adding to the number of state-administered assessments?**

The new state assessments are comparable to the previous TCAP system with the statutory additions of: social studies in grades 4, 7 and 12; and 11th grade testing in English language arts and math. The addition of 11th grade (also known as the culminating) PARCC assessments allows students to use the results of those assessments for higher education course placement purposes (and, for Colorado institutions, for admissions purposes).

## **How much time will the tests take?**

The testing time for the typical student in TCAP versus CMAS is comparable. Testing times are largely the same with the exception of 3rd and 11th grade. Overall, the estimated amount of testing time on CMAS is expected to be less than 1.5 percent of typical students' total instructional time. Administering tests online can take more time from a scheduling standpoint than paper/pencil tests as schools need to cycle students through their computer labs. The fewer computer devices a school has, the lengthier the window that is needed to complete the online testing. Colorado participated in PARCC field testing and also administered the Colorado-developed social studies and science tests in the spring of 2014 to help uncover the challenges from a scheduling/administration standpoint. These lessons learned are helping to develop online test administration strategies moving forward which will minimize overall impact on schools.

## **What is Colorado's involvement with PARCC?**

Colorado is an active member of PARCC. Over 50 educators, including higher education and K-12, are involved in a range of assessment design and review committees. In addition, Commissioner Hammond serves as a member of the Executive Committee, the key decision making body on PARCC. Over 100 Colorado districts participated in field testing the PARCC assessments in preparation for spring 2015 administration.

## **What states/jurisdictions are actively participating in PARCC?**

The following jurisdictions participate in PARCC: AZ, AR, CO, Washington D.C., IL, LA, MD, MA, MS, NY, NM, NJ, OH and RI.

## **How is PARCC engaging higher education?**

In total, 640 colleges and universities have committed to participate in PARCC. These colleges and universities, including many flagship universities and most of the largest state systems, have pledged to participate in the development of the new college-ready assessments in mathematics and English language arts/literacy and have signed on to ultimately use these tests as college placement tools.

## **What are the benefits of PARCC participation?**

- PARCC received \$180 million to develop a high quality test that measures higher order thinking. No single state would be able to devote those resources to develop its own test of comparable quality.
- In our highly mobile society, students and their families need to know that if they move from Colorado to another state, they will not miss a beat in their learning progression. They need to be able to have performance measures that allow them to compare how they are performing with their peers in other states. The PARCC tests will provide a basis for measuring student progress in attaining the standards and their performance relative to their Colorado peers and PARCC peers.



- Colorado's new higher education admissions and remediation policies allow institutions to use PARCC scores for both course placement and admissions purposes. The multi-state aspect of PARCC provides another basis for comparison of Colorado students to their peers as colleges consider their college readiness.
- The comparability of the test results and the basis of the test on the Common Core State Standards (which Colorado adopted along with 44 other states) make it far superior to a state-developed test.

### **Are we testing too much?**

In addition to the state-required tests, districts administer a range of local assessments from teacher-developed assessments to district-purchased assessments. In many cases, these assessments account for 50-70 percent of the overall testing occurring. The question of the appropriate balance of state and district assessments in our learning system is a good one. As we move to new tests, the change fosters a healthy dialog about why we are testing, what role the tests play, how do the tests connect with local assessments, etc. These are the right questions to be asking. CDE has engaged WestEd, a nonprofit education research agency, to conduct a multi-phase study of these very issues about how/where the state can relieve the testing burden (e.g., phasing in the movement to online tests, making some of our non-federally required tests optional or done on a sampling basis, etc.), while still maintaining the important role of shared assessments that provide accountability for our system.

### **Where can I learn more?**

- CDE assessment website: [www.cde.state.co.us/Assessment](http://www.cde.state.co.us/Assessment)
- CDE standards website: [www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction](http://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction)
- To view all CDE fact sheets: [www.cde.state.co.us/Communications/factsheetsandfaq](http://www.cde.state.co.us/Communications/factsheetsandfaq)