

Dear Superintendents,

Thank you for taking the time to consider the high school administration schedule for the new science and social studies assessments. The two options that you were asked to consider involved 1) the administration of the high school science and social studies assessments in the spring of the 11th grade and 2) the administration of the high school science and social studies assessments in the fall of the 12th grade. As we move forward with the development and implementation of these assessments, guidance from Colorado districts and schools is critically important and highly valued.

We received feedback from many individuals from across the state, and, as expected, the perspectives on the direction that should be taken were diverse and varied. Out of 82 total responses, 43 suggested that they be administered in the fall of the 12th grade, 15 suggested that the high school science and social studies assessments be administered in the spring of the 11th grade, and 24 did not favor either plan or suggested an alternative plan. Many of the alternative plans involved a hybrid of the two plans where one content area would be assessed in the spring of 11th grade and the other content area would be assessed in the fall of the 12th grade.

With careful consideration of these responses, it has been determined that contingent upon legislative approval, the science and social studies assessments will be administered to high school students in the fall of 12th grade. While this response was the most favored by respondents, we are aware that issues and concerns surrounding this plan exist. We would like to take the opportunity to address a few of those concerns here.

1. Why can't science and social studies be assessed in the 10th grade?

Scope and sequence (i.e., course sequence) for science and social studies varies across the state, especially in grades 9 and 10. It is not until grade 11 that there is significant overlap in the courses covered. To enable optimal coverage of the high school standards, the earliest the science and social studies assessments can be given is 11th grade.

2. What can be done to encourage student accountability on state assessments in high school?

Both the *draft* high school graduation guidelines and the already adopted and more rigorous endorsed diploma criteria specifically reference performance on the state assessments as one of several means students might use to demonstrate mastery of the Colorado Academic Standards. As students are asked to take responsibility for proving academic competency in order to earn their diploma, an increased likelihood of greater student accountability on the state high school assessments is expected.

3. Why not use ACT in place of other high school assessments?

The Colorado ACT is a college entrance exam that was not designed to measure the depth and breadth of the Colorado Academic Standards. An ACT social studies test does not exist at all.

4. Why is Colorado planning on English language arts and mathematics assessments in the 11th grade?

In compliance with legislation, Colorado joined the Partnership for the Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) as a governing member this past summer. PARCC is a multi-state

assessment consortium that is developing shared English language arts and mathematics assessments. Over 20 states participate in the consortium. As a governing member, Colorado is committed to relying on the PARCC assessment system. PARCC has English language arts assessments in grades 3-11 and mathematics assessments in grades 3-8 with three high school assessments. PARCC has developed college and career ready determinations that will be based on the assessments given in 11th grade. Students with the college and career readiness designation will be eligible for enrollment in college credit bearing courses without the need for remediation.

5. What will happen if students graduate before the fall of their senior year?

This issue is still under discussion. The current assumption is that students who graduate early and who are not enrolled at the time of testing would not be expected to test. However, students who are concurrently enrolled would still be considered part of the high school's population, and would thus be expected to test. Given district authority to determine grade level assignment, it may be that districts could choose to designate the year of expected graduation, but no later than the 4th year of high school, as the 12th grade/senior year. Alternatively, we may also be able to consider establishing the fall of 12th grade or the fourth year of high school as the "no later than" date; so students could take the assessment in an earlier year if they were prepared. Options that allow some flexibility will continue to be considered and guidance will be provided to districts as these options are refined.

6. When will the social studies and science assessment frameworks be ready?

Releasing assessment frameworks for the new social studies and science assessments to the field is a top priority. The Assessment Unit is currently working with its assessment vendor to ensure that the frameworks will be released for comment to the field no later than November 19th.

Once again, thank you for taking time to consider and respond to this important issue. The timing of high school assessment administration is a complicated issue that elicits many unique perspectives. While the selected administration plan is not without limitations, it provides an avenue whereby districts are provided with flexibility in determining scope and sequencing for science and social studies and whereby the testing burden will be decreased for 11th graders. Thank you for your collaboration on this effort and we look forward to working with you as Colorado transitions into the new assessment system.

Sincerely,
Jill