

A photograph of several students sitting at desks in a classroom, focused on their work. A young woman in a yellow shirt is in the foreground, looking down at her paper. Next to her, a young man in a blue shirt is also looking down, writing. Other students are visible in the background, some looking towards the camera and others looking at their work.

# PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW Assessments in California

In 2010, California adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn in English language arts and mathematics as they progress through grades K–12.

In the 2014–15 school year, California will begin rolling out new assessments aligned to the CCSS. The new assessments will be used to gauge how well students are mastering the standards—and, ultimately, how ready they are for college and further career education and training.

## WHAT ARE THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS?

The CCSS are designed to enhance and improve student learning. The CCSS have greater clarity and rigor than most previous standards and are relevant to the real world, giving young people the knowledge and skills they need for college and career success. They are also robust, ensuring a future U.S. workforce that can compete in the global economy.

The new standards emphasize fewer topics and stress not only procedural skills but also conceptual and critical thinking. The CCSS build knowledge from grade to grade, enabling students to master important concepts before moving on to others.

**The standards are not a curriculum.** Decisions about curriculum, tools, materials, and textbooks are left to local districts and schools, which know their students best.

The CCSS were developed through a state-led initiative, spearheaded by governors and state superintendents, in collaboration with teachers, school administrators,

college faculty, parents, and education experts. They build on the excellent foundation laid across all states to date, and have been internationally benchmarked to ensure rigor on par with top performing nations.

To date, more than 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the CCSS.

Local schools and districts are currently overseeing the CCSS implementation in the classroom. They have developed a range of professional development opportunities to support educators.

## THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

- Overview of new assessments, which measure student proficiency against more rigorous standards
- Sample test questions
- Overview of accountability for students, teachers, and schools
- Additional resources for parents

# CCSS-Aligned Assessments

## WHY NEW ASSESSMENTS?

Teachers and principals talk a lot about assessments, which are used to measure students' academic achievement. This document highlights the end-of-year summative assessments, which judge student progress toward mastering state standards and program and school effectiveness. For other assessments used, see box at right.

New summative assessments will address longstanding concerns that parents, educators, and employers have had about current state assessments—namely that they measure the ability to memorize facts, rather than the skills to think critically and apply knowledge.

## WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT THE NEW SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS?

The new assessments for English and math will enable educators to deepen their understanding of student progress from grade to grade—and, just as importantly, identify any gaps in progress so they can address them **well before students enter college or the workforce.**

## Types of assessments

**Formative:** Individual tests given by teachers as needed throughout the year to assess knowledge and skills in specific areas and adjust instruction

**Interim:** Tests repeated at regular intervals to measure student growth against a particular set of standards over time

**Summative:** End-of-year assessments administered by the state to measure student performance against a common set of standards

*This document addresses summative assessments.*

## New English language arts assessments:

- Ask students to read more complex non-fiction and fiction texts and use evidence from these texts to answer questions, make inferences, and present persuasive written arguments
- Emphasize literacy across all subjects, not just English
- Test writing at every grade level

## New math assessments:

- Go beyond multiple-choice questions and present students with multi-step problems, conceptual questions, and real-world applications
- Ask students to not only get answers correct, but also explain how they arrived at those answers
- Cover fewer topics in greater depth, focusing on the most critical areas

## Benefits of new assessments

- Scores provide students, parents, and teachers with insight into college and career readiness early enough to address issues and provide extra support where needed.
- California has transitioned to what are called “computer adaptive assessments,” which replace pencil-and-paper tests and can adjust the difficulty of questions based on student responses. In general with adaptive testing, a student who answers correctly will receive a more challenging item, while an incorrect answer generates an easier question. This method provides students with a more engaging test experience, is more time-efficient, and—especially for low- or high-achieving students—produces more accurate results than traditional methods.

## Who is developing the new assessments?

Because CCSS is a state-led initiative, most states across the country chose to join one of two consortia of states working together to develop new assessments based on Common Core State Standards. These are the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

California is a member of the Smarter Balanced along with more than 20 other states. However, all customization and final decisions about assessments remain at the state level, in partnership with local educators. Read more about the Smarter Balanced at [www.SmarterBalanced.org](http://www.SmarterBalanced.org)



**NOTE:** While taking advantage of technology, new assessments are designed to work with the computing resources in schools today. The assessments work fine on very old operating systems and require minimal processors and memory. However, states that have not yet made the transition to online testing will be offered a paper-and-pencil option for the first three years.

- New assessments will allow California to compare student performance not only across schools and districts statewide, but also with other states that have adopted the CCSS.
- The new assessments are designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners—allowing these students to perform to their potential. The goal of the accommodations is to make the assessments more accessible and to produce results that are valid for these students. The intention is not to give them an advantage over other students. For students with disabilities, the online assessments will address visual, auditory, and physical-access barriers. These students will be able to take a test individualized to meet their needs at the same time as other students in their class. Tools have also been developed to help English language learners demonstrate their knowledge, regardless of their level of proficiency in English.

## College Content-Readiness Defined:

The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or in a high-quality certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement.

# Sample questions by grade level

The following questions are representative of those found on the new assessments. For more examples, visit [www.smarterbalanced.org/pilot-test](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/pilot-test).

## EXAMPLE OF A 5TH GRADE MATH QUESTION

### SAMPLE ITEM

Five swimmers compete in a 50-meter race. The finish time for each swimmer is shown in the video.

 23.42	 23.35
 23.18	 23.24
 23.21	

Explain how the results of the race would change if the race used a clock that rounded to the nearest tenth.

**Explanation:**

## EXAMPLE OF A 6TH GRADE ENGLISH QUESTION

### SAMPLE ITEM

Students are asked to read the essay “Planes on the Brain” by Elisabeth Deffner, from Faces Magazine, and answer the following questions:

1. How does the author emphasize the point that the TAM program was a positive influence on the sisters’ lives? Use details from the text to support your answer.
2. Highlight the parts of the text that provide evidence to support the idea that the Tuskegee Airmen were historically important.
3. What does the author mean by “the sky is no longer the limit”? Use details from the text to support your response.

**Answer:**

## EXAMPLE OF AN 11TH GRADE ENGLISH QUESTION

### SAMPLE ITEM

**The following excerpt is from a writer’s first draft of a narrative essay. Read the excerpt. Then rewrite it, revising it to correct errors.**

I had no idea what to expect when I walked into the arena. There were people everywhere, most of them clad in brightly colored jersey’s with different players’ names on the back of them. There were some names I couldnt even pronounce. Me and my friend made our way to the corridor that led to the ice rink. The minute I stepped through the doorway, I could feel a rush of cold air hit my face. I could actually smell the ice! I never thought ice had a smell, but it really does. The next thing I noticed was the size, of the ice rink. There were lines and circles painted all over it, and I knew immediately I wouldn’t understand the rules. We found our seats, and it wasn’t long before the game started. We sat so close to the action that I felt as if I was right in the middle of it, the action was so intense it was hard to follow the puck, keep an eye on the players, and to figure out which team was ahead. When the home team scored a goal. The entire arena erupted with cheering that was so loud, I bet it was heard across town. by the end of the game, I felt so many emotions: delight, disappointment, fear, and excitement. Mostly, though, I felt in awe of the athletes who played this game. They are much more tougher than I ever expected. I suspect others new to hockey will be as impressed as me by this fast, interesting game.

**Now rewrite the excerpt, revising it to correct errors.**

**Answer:**

## What Parents Can Expect

This is a new system with a new way of scoring. Therefore, it is not possible to directly compare new scores with old ones.

The new assessments measure deeper knowledge and skills deemed particularly important to students' futures, including problem-solving, writing, and critical thinking. The scores provide students, parents, and teachers with the ability to address issues well before students are ready to graduate.

Because rigor is higher, student achievement scores may initially be lower. A dip should not necessarily be interpreted as a decline in student learning or in educator performance. Educators expect the short-term decline to reverse as teachers and students become more familiar with the standards and better equipped to meet the challenges they present.

### How will schools support students during the transition?

Schools have created a variety of models to assist students who are struggling with the standards. Remediation and summer courses, in-class adjustments based on ongoing in-class assessment results, and pull-out tutoring are just a few support strategies.

**\* TAKE ACTION:** Parents can work with school or district curriculum directors to learn about the new curriculum and understand how to support their children to minimize any dips in assessment scores.

### How will students and teachers be held accountable?

Student and teacher accountability are primarily determined and administered by local schools and districts. However, California does require students to pass an exit examination in order to graduate high school. The state will continue to administer the California High School Exit Examination (CAHSEE) in school years 2013–14 and 2014–15. This assessment is issued in 10th grade, giving students a two-year opportunity to work with educators on building the skills needed to pass.

Starting in school year 2015–16, the state accountability plan will stipulate that no more than 60 percent of high school performance ratings be based on state assessment scores (which demonstrate student growth), and that 40 percent be comprised of other indicators, such as graduation and college- and career-readiness.

Teacher evaluations are administered at the local school and district level. Local administrators are in the process of refining their accountability plans and are working with parents, teachers, and the community to determine the best systems for ensuring teachers are helping students meet the CCSS.

**\* TAKE ACTION:** Parents need to pay close attention to the new local accountability system being put in place, so they can better advocate for their children. Parents' collective voice is critical to ensure that testing is implemented well and with enough resources to ensure success. Local schools and districts should include parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration, and respect. If you would like additional details about how students, teachers, and schools will be held accountable or more information on assessments in general, please contact the Department of Education's Statewide Assessment Transition Office at 916-319-0758.

#### HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS YOU MIGHT WANT TO ASK:

- What will happen if my child does not meet proficiency on the new assessments?
- How will teacher evaluations be affected if students don't meet proficiency levels?
- How will school ratings change based on results of the new assessments? (This is determined at the state level)

If you have questions regarding changes to the state or federal accountability systems, call the Academic Accountability Unit at 916-323-1341.

# Preparing and supporting your child

- Discuss the new tests with your child. Make sure he or she is not scared or anxious going into the new tests.
- With an older child, explain that the new assessments were created to help him or her better prepare for college and career.
- Explain to your child that the tests will initially be more challenging. Tell your child you have high expectations and that you are there to help every step of the way.
- Review test results with your child. Bring the teacher into the discussion as needed.
- Provide a quiet, comfortable place for studying at home and make sure your child gets a good night's sleep and a nutritious breakfast before a test.

## Staying informed and involved

- Become familiar with the Common Core State Standards.
- Explore practice tests through an interactive online platform at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/pilot-test/>
- Read all comments written by the teacher on assignments, tests, and report cards. Ask teachers to explain anything that is unclear and discuss how you can best work together to address comments.
- Monitor your child's progress. If your child needs extra help or wants to learn more about a subject, work with his or her teacher to identify opportunities for tutoring, after-school clubs or other resources.
- Do not judge your child based on a single test score. Tests are not perfect measures of what a child can do. There are many other factors that might influence a test score. For example, a child can be affected by the way he or she is feeling on test day or the particular classroom setting.
- Meet with your child's teacher as often as possible to discuss his or her progress. Ask for activities to do at home to help prepare for tests and improve your child's proficiency.

## Additional Resources

- What the CCSS mean at each grade level: [www.pta.org/parentsguide](http://www.pta.org/parentsguide)
- The Common Core in California: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/index.asp>
- Smarter Balanced assessment consortium, of which California is a member: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org>
- California testing and accountability: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta>