Colorado Measures of Academic Success

What are Colorado Measures of Academic Success?

Colorado assessments are changing in order to accurately assess student mastery of the updated Colorado Academic Standards. The Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) name encompasses the new Colorado-developed science and social studies assessments as well as the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)-developed, English language arts (ELA) and mathematics assessments. In 2013-14, as the new CMAS science and social studies assessments are implemented and TCAP reading, writing and mathematics assessments are administered for the final year, CDE will begin transitioning to the new name for the state assessments – Colorado Measures of Academic Success. The CMAS PARCC English language arts and mathematics assessments will be administered for the first time in spring 2015.

- See more at: http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/factsheetsandfaqs-assessment#CMAS

Why do we need new assessments?

The Colorado State Board of Education adopted updated Colorado Academic Standards in 10 content areas in December 2009 and then adopted the Common Core State Standards for English language arts and mathematics in August 2010. The updated standards are to be fully implemented in all schools by the 2013-14 school year. Challenging new standards require next-generation assessments that measure students’ knowledge of the new expectations. The assessments also provide educators with important information they need to prepare their students for success.

As part of a balanced assessment system, state assessments provide valuable information to students, families, schools, districts, the state, and taxpayers. A 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 or course/unit, end of year assessments to find out what students know and can do).

The state assessments are summative assessments. Where 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. They help students and their families know how they are performing compared to the standards and compared to their peers and how they’ve grown over time. They enable teachers to see how their students are performing against the standards and identify areas they may need to adjust in their practice for the future. And, they provide school/district leaders, the state, policymakers, and the public with information on how well the system is meeting the goals of helping every child attain academic proficiency. The data is used to inform continuous improvement of the system at all levels.

What are the benefits of the new assessments?
Computer-based assessments will replace pencil and paper tests. Computer-based assessments allow for more engaging and innovative assessment items that enable testing of higher-order thinking skills. They are more aligned with 21st Century teaching and learning practices.

The new assessments are designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners.

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 to apply what they learn; not just follow procedures but understand the mathematics behind them. They also require students to understand concepts 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.

- Colorado’s new standards in reading, writing, and communicating are designed to ensure that students fully understand what they read and that they can effectively talk and write about it. The standards ask students not only to be able to understand what they read but to make arguments based on that understanding and to examine the logic of others. These skills are needed to succeed in K–12, college, and beyond — regardless of 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.

These tests 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 updated 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.

In English language arts and mathematics, states will be able to benchmark student progress on a broader scale by comparing results with states and districts across the country.

Which assessments will be given this school year (2013-14)?

2013-14 is the last year TCAP will be administered to assess reading, writing and mathematics. The new CMAS science and social studies assessments will be administered this spring in grades 4, 5, 7, and 8.

Are states required to administer state-wide assessments and what are the minimum requirements?
States that accept federal funds for such purposes 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 screeners for English language learners).

**Does Colorado require more assessments than the federal minimum?**

Colorado’s new statewide summative assessment system, as outlined in state statute, includes the following assessments:

- Grades 3 through 11 for English language arts (under TCAP grades 3-10 were assessed)
- Grades 3 through 8 and three times in high school (under TCAP grades 3-10 were assessed)
- Once in elementary, middle, and high school for science
- Once in elementary, middle, and high school for social studies
- ACT in 11th grade

Colorado has had two assessments in high school for English language arts and math and the ACT. The state will be adding 11th grade English language arts and math in 2014-15. A key rationale from education practitioners and policymakers for having these 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 9th grade assessments) and to then have an assessment that gave a closer approximation to their readiness (the 10th grade assessment) followed by the measure of readiness accepted by colleges and universities, the 11th grade assessment and the ACT. 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 TCAP with the addition of social studies in grades 4, 7, and 12 and the addition of 11th grade testing in English language arts and math. TCAP included reading, writing, math, and science. Under the Colorado Measures of Academic Success assessment system, reading and writing are combined into one assessment – English language arts, math and science remain, and social studies is added. The addition of 11th grade testing 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% of typical students' total instructional time.

**How much do the new assessments cost?**

The General Assembly allocated approximately $6 million to develop state science and social studies assessments, including alternate assessments for our students with significant cognitive disabilities. The General Assembly also directed the state to participate in a consortium of states developing shared assessments for English language arts and mathematics. Colorado is a member of the PARCC consortium. The consortium funds the design cost for the assessments. The administration costs are expected to be similar to TCAP administration with some added costs to cover 11th grade and to have paper-based options where needed.

**How is CDE examining the impact of the assessment changes on districts?**

The amount of tests and testing time are largely comparable from the TCAP system to the new CMAS system. That said, moving to an online testing environment, adding social studies, and adding 11th grade assessments have a range of intended and unintended implications on districts, schools, teachers, and students. In addition, the General Assembly has adopted legislation regarding literacy assessments and school readiness assessments that districts are implementing.

To study the implications of these assessment changes on districts, CDE is working with WestEd, a nonprofit education research agency, to research the assessment requirements, gather data from a representative sample of districts across the state regarding the implications of the requirements, and submit findings and recommendations to the department. This study will also take into consideration district and school level assessments. The multi-phase study will provide information this spring (from data gathered prior to the science and social studies assessments), summer (from data gathered after the science and social studies assessments), and at various times during the 2014-15 school year to inform the work pre/post PARCC administration. The department plans to share the results of the study with stakeholders, use the information to refine state administration policies and procedures, and use the recommendations to propose any policy changes that might emerge from the findings.

- See more at: [http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/factsheetsandfaqs-assessment#CMAS](http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/factsheetsandfaqs-assessment#CMAS)