

PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW Assessments in Washington

In July 2011, Washington adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). 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, Washington will begin rolling out new assessments aligned to the CCSS. The new assessments are being used to gauge how well students are mastering the standards – and ultimately, how ready students are for college and further career education and training. In spring 2014, some schools will participate in a nationwide field test to try out the new assessments and ensure that the process will run well when the tests are fully administered in Washington and other participating states.

WHAT ARE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS?

Common Core State Standards are designed to enhance and improve student learning. CCSS have greater clarity and rigor than most previous standards. They 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. 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 that know their students best.

Common Core State Standards were developed through a state-led initiative spearheaded by governors and state superintendents, working in collaboration with teachers, school administrators,

college faculty, parents, and education experts. They build on the excellent foundation laid across all states, 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.

In December 2011, Washington began implementing CCSS changes in each district, school, and classroom. To prepare educators, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) offers a quarterly webinar series to support implementation. Professional development opportunities are offered in all nine of the state's Educational Service Districts. Online resources are also available to assist educators and administrators.

THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

- Overview of new assessments, which measure student proficiency against more rigorous standards
- Sample test items
- 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 some current assessments – namely that they measure students' ability to memorize facts, rather than their critical thinking and knowledge application skills.

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 and address them **well before students enter college or the workforce.**

Types of assessments

Classroom-based: Individual tests given by teachers as needed throughout the year to assess knowledge and skills in specific areas

Interim: The same test repeated at set intervals to measure student growth 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 fiction and non-fiction texts and use evidence from these texts to answer questions, make inferences, and present persuasive 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 not only to 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.
- Washington will transition to computer adaptive assessments, which replace pencil-and-paper and online tests and can adjust the difficulty of questions based on student responses. 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 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).

Washington is a member of the Smarter Balanced, along with 25 other states and territories. 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



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 Washington to compare student performance across schools and districts statewide, as well as with performance of students in other states that have adopted the Common Core.
- 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. 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. The goal of the accommodations is to make the assessments more accessible and to produce results that are valid for these students, not to give them an advantage over other students.

College Content Readiness Defined:

The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing course at a post-secondary 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.

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 the standards are more rigorous, 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 are students held accountable?

In Washington state, students must pass certain tests to graduate. The number and the types of tests changes occasionally as new bills are passed by the state Legislature. To learn about the latest requirements, visit www.k12.wa.us/assessment/StateTesting/default.aspx.

How will schools support students during the transition?

Schools and districts have created a variety of models to assist students who are struggling with the standards. These include remediation, summer courses, and in-class adjustments based on ongoing in-class assessment results. Check with your local school district for services available in your school.

If Students Need Additional Help

If children experience a dip in progress and state test results, don't hesitate to discuss this with their teachers and to work with the school to develop a plan for enrichment or improvement.

How are teachers held accountable?

In the 2013-2014 school year, Washington state will implement new teacher and principal evaluation programs. For both teachers and principals there will be eight distinct criteria. For teachers, three of the criteria are directly related to student growth—the change in test scores over a period of time. Principals have different criteria, which address such things as school culture, safety, and community interaction, as well as student achievement. The new evaluations will remain in place as the new assessments are implemented. Another key component of the new evaluation programs is that teachers and principals will be rated on a scale with four levels—distinguished, proficient, basic, and unsatisfactory. This will give them a clearer picture of their performance and help target professional development.

How are schools held accountable?

In July 2012, Washington state received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education for Elementary and Secondary Education Act requirements, which exempts the OSPI from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. The waiver requires OSPI to establish Annual Measurable Objectives (AMOs). AMOs are unique targets in reading and mathematics for every school and district in the state. They are derived by first calculating "proficiency gaps," which are based on the number of students who do not pass the test. In addition, the Washington State Board of Education and OSPI have created a new achievement index. The index is a snapshot of a school's performance, based on state assessments in reading, writing, math, and science and graduation rates. Parents will be able to see how any school or district in the state is performing.

Preparing and supporting your child

- Discuss the new tests with your child. Make sure he or she is not afraid or anxious going into the new tests.
- With an older child, explain that the new assessments were created to make sure he or she is on track to succeed after graduation and to identify any issues early enough to give more support where it is needed.
- Explain to your child that the tests might initially be more challenging than previous tests. 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, taking time to discuss areas of strength and areas where there is room for improvement. 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 before a test.

Staying informed and involved

- Become familiar with the Common Core State Standards.
- Explore practice tests through an interactive online platform at www.smarterbalanced.org/pilot-test
- Read all comments written by teachers on classroom lessons and tests. 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.
- Understand that tests are not perfect measures of what a child can do. Scores can be affected by the way he or she is feeling on test day or the particular classroom setting. Assessments are useful but should not be the only factor in determining a child's academic growth.
- 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

- For a more detailed look at what CCSS mean at each grade level, visit: www.pta.org/parentsguide
- For more information on the implementation of CCSS in Washington, visit: www.k12.wa.us/Corestandards/default.aspx
- For more information on the Smarter Balanced consortium, of which Washington is a member, visit: www.smarterbalanced.org