

# A BIG WIN FOR COLORADO STUDENTS

## Colorado Academic Standards



Colorado is no stranger to college- and career-ready standards. In 2009, the State Board of Education developed a state-specific set of college- and career-ready standards called the Colorado Academic Standards (CAS). These standards were designed to prepare our students with the skills they need to be 21st century learners. Although we had these standards in place, they were not enough. On the Nation's Report Card, also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), fewer than half of our students in every subject and grade were proficient.

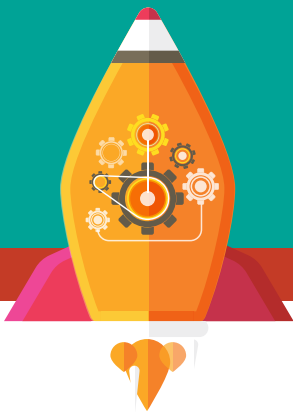
In 2010, Colorado joined the other 47 states in the development of the Common Core State Standards, using CAS as a guideline. That same year, the State Board incorporated the Common Core standards into CAS. In 2013, teachers began instructing on the skills and content outlined in the standards. This updated set of comprehensive standards are higher, clearer, and more focused on learning and applying the essential skills and knowledge our students need to be successful in college and careers—such as critical thinking, collaboration, and problem solving. In short, they help ensure that every student in Colorado is prepared for college-level work and careers upon graduation.

Colorado's Proficiency Rates on the Nation's Report Card

Year	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2011	47%	39%	43%	40%
2013	50%	41%	42%	40%

Colorado's previous standards were not providing our students with all of the skills they need for success. Although most of our students were proficient on state assessments, very few scored as well on more rigorous tests. In 2011, 80% of our 8th grade students were proficient on the state math test, but only 35% achieved that level on an international math test, Trends in International Math Science Study, commonly referred to as TIMSS. It comes as no surprise then that 37% of freshmen enrolled at public Colorado universities had to take at least one remedial course in 2012, at a cost of more than \$56 million.

With the adoption of the new standards, Coloradans are one step closer to ensuring that our youth will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2018, there will be more than 900,000 job openings in Colorado, 67% of which will require a degree beyond high school. By raising the bar, we can be confident that Colorado's students will be qualified to fill these jobs, contributing to the growth of our economy.



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## Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers across Colorado have been hard at work putting these academic goals in place. It has been a significant undertaking requiring many hours of professional development, updating curricula and teaching strategies, and engaging students in a more thought-provoking way. For more than two years, more than 30,000 teachers helped develop sample curricula in addition to classroom lessons and attended professional development workshops across the state.

The next phase of this work is to improve the assessments given to Colorado's students so that they are more meaningful to them, their teachers, and their parents in determining which skills a student has or has not yet mastered in order to be better prepared for their futures.

Putting better assessments in place is not enough, however. This step needs to be part of a larger system of accountability that supports student achievement and holds schools accountable for successfully teaching the skills outlined in the standards. At the heart of accountability is the need to ensure that all students across Colorado are receiving the same high-quality education. Meaningful tests serve as school-wide checkups that can identify struggling students and schools in need of extra support so interventions can be put in place. In addition, improved assessments can identify high-achieving students who require support to maintain their academic engagement and provide them the resources necessary to continue to help them excel.

For the past four years, teams of teachers and academic and testing experts have been working tirelessly to create two new testing options aligned to the new standards: PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. These two assessment systems were field-tested this past spring in 35 states and Washington, D.C. The new tests aim to:

- Accurately measure students' progress toward college and career readiness;
- Assess a wide range of skills, including real-world skills, such as critical thinking and writing;
- Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning.

Colorado became a member of PARCC in 2011 to develop an aligned version of the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS). These new tests will be administered in all grades in both math and language arts at the end of the 2014–15 school year. There has recently been a lot of controversy surrounding the updated tests, including districts trying to opt out or delay administering the CMAS. But there are many benefits to staying the course. The new tests offer comparability across districts and ensure that students across the state are held to the same high expectations. If a student moves to a different district, he or she will still be held to the same benchmarks, and teachers will have an accurate measure of student strengths and weaknesses as soon as that student enters their classroom. If districts opt out and choose different tests, this benefit will be lost. Another advantage is when a student's family relocates, they are likely to have a much smoother transition from one school to another.

Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the CMAS because it includes so many of the criteria that make up a high-quality test. The tests will be a great measuring stick of how our students are doing on the path to college and careers—both at the state and national level. As advocates, we need to ensure the new state tests not only accurately measure college and career readiness, but also possess the characteristics that will make them a useful tool to help students improve.

## What Does a High-Quality Assessment Look Like?

A high-quality assessment:

- Is fully aligned to the underlying standards;
- Is developed with input from academic and testing experts—and most importantly, teachers;
- Is field-tested and reviewed before full implementation;
- Assesses a wide range of real-world skills using a variety of question formats;
- Provides detailed and timely feedback that acts as an “academic checkup” and sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are not on track so interventions can be put in place; and
- Is comparable across the entire state, so that students who move from one district to another are held to the same standards of performance and have a smoother transition relocating.

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. What is the difference between curriculum and standards?

- Standards are a set of guidelines for what students are expected to know and be able to do at a specific point in their education. Standards provide the foundation for key components of the education system, including curricula, instructional materials, teacher training, and assessments.
- A curriculum is the course of study covering the standards. It is set by local school districts and includes the lesson plans, programs, and textbooks that teachers use to teach the content and skills outlined in the standards.

### 2. If students are learning with different curricula, how can they take the same test?

- Although teachers use different materials and curricula, students still learn the same skills outlined in the standards. Teachers can be creative in their instruction, designing lessons to best reach their students and creating a classroom where all students can achieve.

### 3. Will the updated test replace the old state test?

- Yes. The new CMAS assessments will replace the transitional TCAP test across the state in both English language arts and math in all grades in the spring of 2015.

### 4. How will test scores impact schools and districts?

- School-wide test results will be used as one measure for school accountability. Just as we use tests as academic checkups for individual students, they're also used as checkups for our schools. We need to identify areas of low performance so that interventions can be put in place to ensure students are on track to graduate college and career ready.

### 5. How will test scores impact students?

- Test scores do not influence graduation or promotion. For students to enroll in college-level credit-bearing courses, they must meet minimum college readiness requirements. Local school districts will be able to provide additional options for students to demonstrate mastery.



## Why Support the Colorado Academic Standards?

- The standards are rigorous, streamlined, relevant, and better prepare students for college and the workforce.
- They challenge students to think critically, write extensively, and solve real-world problems at a greater capacity, raising the bar for all students.
- They are similar to high-quality international standards to ensure that our students are prepared to compete in a global economy.
- They clearly outline skills students need to master at each grade so teachers can focus more deeply on these areas.

## Why Do We Need Good Tests?

- They give us an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- They ensure all students are held to the same expectations.
- They identify struggling students so they can get the help they need.

## 6. How will test scores impact teachers?

- Student test scores will not be used in teacher evaluations for the first year the new test is given in order to allow teachers an adjustment period. In the 2015–16 school year, student growth outcomes, which include test scores, will be included in evaluations, but will not be worth more than 50%.
- Colorado has developed a task force to review the impact of the assessments on teacher evaluations, as well as district and school accountability. The task force is currently meeting.

## 7. What kind of professional development did teachers receive in preparation for the standards and the new test?

- In 2012, teachers across the state participated in creating curriculum samples aligned to the standards. Large groups of teachers met in 2013 to refine these samples. Along with the samples, the Colorado Department of Education website has instructional units and support to help teachers align their instruction to the standards.

## 8. What does the new test cost? Is it more expensive?

- It cost the state nothing to join the PARCC consortium. This means Colorado has the benefit of not incurring the cost of developing a new test.
- If the state changed course now, it would mean additional work for teachers and administrators as well as an estimated \$9 million to \$11 million to design our own assessments.
- The per-student cost of the new CMAS assessment being developed by the consortium is less than the previous TCAP test.

## 9. What kind of data will be collected? Will it be released?

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Colorado is required to collect data on the performance of schools. The state will collect information on student achievement and progress, but will not release any personally identifiable student information. Federal law protects the privacy of student information and education records through the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- In June 2014, the state legislature passed the Student Data Privacy Act, which prohibits the state from sharing individual student data with any organizations outside of the state, and only allows them to use collective data on public reports.

## What is PARCC?

- A group of states working together to create new computer-based assessments that will measure whether a student is on track to graduate high school prepared for college and careers.

## 10. How were teachers involved in the test development process?

- Twenty-one Colorado teachers and nineteen school administrators were involved in the development and review of PARCC test items and reading passages. Teachers were also members of the Education Leader Cadre, a group of teachers who met in face-to-face meetings and virtual convenings to share best practices, engage in reviewing PARCC state-developed instructional materials, and become active leaders in state and local implementation.

## 11. Do students need to be computer literate? If so, how will schools meet the technology requirements?

- Students will need to be computer literate. For the math test, however, paper-based versions are available for all grades.
- While it may take some time to ensure every school has the hardware necessary and meets the technological requirements, this is a smart investment. Technology is not going away. Ensuring that all students, regardless of geography or household income, have equal access to technology is critical to preparing students for a 21st century competitive workforce.

## 12. Where can I go for more information?

- [www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/coloradostandards-academicstandards](http://www.cde.state.co.us/standardsandinstruction/coloradostandards-academicstandards)
- [www.cde.state.co.us/assessment](http://www.cde.state.co.us/assessment)
- [www.parcconline.org](http://www.parcconline.org)
- [www.BusinessForCore.org](http://www.BusinessForCore.org)