

Parent's Guide To new Assessments in Delaware

In 2010, Delaware 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 years, given State Board of Education adoption, Delaware 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 they are for college and further career education and training. In spring 2014, some schools will participate in a field test to try out the new assessments and ensure that the process will run well when the tests are administered in participating states and schools statewide.

What Are Common Core Standards?

Common Core State Standards are designed to enhance and improve student learning. 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 that know their students best.

The CCSS 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 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.

In 2011, Delaware began implementing CCSS changes, with full implementation launching in districts and schools during the 2013-14 school year. To prepare educators, Delaware has implemented Common Ground for the Common Core – an 18-month initiative to bring administrators and teachers up to speed. The initiative launched with an all-day conference to help districts and schools begin planning and share strategies, followed by a range of ongoing professional development activities that will continue through 2014.

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 shift from an assessment that is primarily multiple-choice items to one with items that require deeper critical thinking and writing.

End-of-year assessments help teachers and administrators plan student programs for school improvement.

What Is Different About The New Summative Assessment?

The new assessments for English language arts and math will enable educators to deepen their understanding of student progress from grade to grade -- and just as importantly, identify and address any gaps in progress **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: Smarter ELA

- 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: Smarter Mathematics

- 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.
- In 2010, Delaware initiated computer adaptive assessments, which replaced pencil-and-paper tests and can adjust the difficulty of questions based on student responses. A student who answers correctly receives a more challenging item, while an incorrect answer generates an easier question. Students receive a more engaging test experience – one that is more time-efficient and produces more accurate results. The new assessments will continue this approach.
- New assessments will allow Delaware to compare student performance not only across schools and districts statewide, but also with that 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. Accommodations will be made to ensure assessments are accessible and produce results that are valid for these students. For students with disabilities, the online assessments will address visual, auditory, and physical access barriers. These students will be able to take an individualized test 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.

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).

Delaware is a member of the Smarter Balanced, along with more than 20 other states. 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

Additional Benefits: In addition to new summative assessments, schools will have access to the following:

- Computer adaptive interim assessments that can be used to get an early indication of how students will perform on the end-of-year exam.
- a digital library of formative assessment tools, practices, and professional development materials that have been selected by peers around the country based on an agreed-upon set of quality criteria. Teachers will be able to use the digital library to improve the way they collect and use information on student learning.

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.

Example of 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 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 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.

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.

 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?

Once the new assessments are implemented in 2014-15, the Delaware Department of Education will revise its accountability plan. The plan will include

school and district accountability procedures and indicate how to address students who do not meet proficiency levels.

Currently, even if a student does not meet proficiency levels, there are no consequences imposed at the state level. Local districts determine retention and remediation policies. Parents can work with the school to develop an improvement plan tailored to the specific student's needs.

The new plan will also articulate teacher accountability measures, ensuring that teacher effectiveness ratings continue to be measured against student progress throughout the year.

As plans are finalized, they will be posted on www.DelExcels.org

 Take Action: Parents need to pay close attention to the new accountability system 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. Delaware 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 your child's school or teacher.

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?

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 www.smarterbalanced.org/pilot-test.
- Read all comments written by teachers 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's performance 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

- For more detailed look at what CCSS mean at each grade level, visit www.delawarepta.org
- For more information on the Smarter Balanced consortium, of which Delaware is a member, visit www.smarterbalanced.org
- For more information on the implementation of CCSS in Delaware, visit www.DelExcels.org