

PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW ASSESSMENTS IN NEW JERSEY

In June 2010, New Jersey 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 (ELA) and mathematics as they progress through grades K–12.

To prepare students for the new assessments that will be administered in 2014–2015, New Jersey implemented a three-year plan to gradually transition students from the currently used New Jersey Assessment of Skills and Knowledge (NJASK). The new assessments will gauge how well students are mastering the CCSS and, ultimately, how ready they are for college and careers.

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 previous standards. They are more relevant to the real world, giving young people the knowledge and skills they need for college and career success. The CCSS 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 rote 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 school superintendents, 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.

Since adoption of the new standards, New Jersey has been implementing CCSS changes in each district, school, and classroom. To prepare educators, New Jersey has made CCSS-related training opportunities available to teachers. In addition, the Department of Education has developed a model curriculum that is aligned with the CCSS and provides students with a more rigorous learning experience.

THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

- Overview of new assessments, which measure student proficiency against more rigorous standards
- Sample 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 students' ability to memorize facts, rather than their critical thinking and knowledge-application skills.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT THE NEW ASSESSMENTS?

The new assessments 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

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.

English language arts assessments demonstrate:

- Whether students can read and comprehend texts of varying complexities.
- How well students can integrate information across sources to make a persuasive argument.
- The degree to which students can use context to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary.

Math assessments demonstrate:

- Whether students understand and can use important math ideas, including number sense, algebraic thinking, geometry, and data analysis.
- The extent to which students can use math facts and reasoning skills to solve real-world problems.
- How well students can make math arguments.

Benefits of new assessments

- During the next few years, assessments will provide results more quickly and in an increasingly readable and easy-to-understand format, most likely online. Parents can use this information to better communicate with teachers and school administrators about their child's progress, and teachers can use it to better tailor instruction to the child's needs.
- Computer-based assessments will replace pencil-and-paper tests (exceptions will be made for schools that do not yet have the technology). Computer-based assessments are more efficient, innovative, and engaging, and they enable insight into student progress at multiple points.
- New assessments will allow New Jersey to compare student performance across schools and districts state-wide as well as with students in other states that have adopted the CCSS.
- School districts will have access to sample questions and online practice tests to help parents prepare their children for assessments.
- The new assessments are designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners. Online assessments can address visual, auditory, and physical-access barriers for students with disabilities, while enabling them to take tests at the same time as others in their class. English language learners will be able to demonstrate knowledge in the various content areas (e.g., math, science, and social science), regardless of their level of proficiency in English. The intention is not to give these students an advantage, but to provide the accessibility needed for accurate results.

Who is developing the new assessments?

Because the 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 the CCSS. These are the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

New Jersey is a member of the PARCC along with 20 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 PARCC at www.parcconline.org

College and Career 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.parconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes.

EXAMPLE OF A 4TH GRADE MATH QUESTION

Three classes at Lakeview School are going on a field trip. The Table shows the number of people in each class, including the teacher.

They can choose to use buses, vans, and cars.



Buses have 20 seats



Vans have 16 seats



Cars have 5 seats

	Total number of people
Mrs. Ruiz's Class	23
Mr. Yangs's Class	25
Mrs. Evan's Class	24

Which three combinations can be used to take all three classes on a field trip?

- 1 bus and 4 vans 1 bus and 8 cars
 3 vans and 11 cars 2 buses and 3 vans and 4 cars
 1 bus and 1 van and 6 cars

Submit Answer

EXAMPLE OF A 6TH GRADE ELA QUESTION

Students are asked to read a passage from the fictional text "Julie of the Wolves" by Jean C. George and answer the following:

SAMPLE ITEM

In the passage, the author developed a strong character named Miyax. Think about Miyax and the details the author used to create the character. The passage ends with Miyax waiting for the black wolf to look at her.

Write an original story to continue where the passage ended. In your story, be sure to use what you have learned about the character Miyax as you tell what happens to her next.

Answer:

EXAMPLE OF A 10TH GRADE ELA QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

Use what you have learned from reading "Daedalus and Icarus" by Ovid and "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph" by Anne Sexton to write an essay that provides an analysis of how Sexton transforms Daedalus and Icarus.

As a starting point, you may want to consider what is emphasized, absent, or different in the two texts, but feel free to develop your own focus for analysis.

Develop your essay by providing textual evidence from both texts. Be sure to follow the conventions of standard English.

Answer:

What Parents Can Expect

This is a new set of standards and assessments 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 for students' futures, including problem-solving, writing, and critical thinking.

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 improve as teachers and students become more familiar with the standards and better equipped to meet the challenges they present.

HOW ARE SCHOOLS AND TEACHERS HELD ACCOUNTABLE?

New Jersey is in the process of revising its accountability plan. The plan, along with new school accountability procedures, will specify the ways schools and teachers will be held accountable.

HOW ARE STUDENTS HELD ACCOUNTABLE?

Results from the new assessments will be used to determine the degree to which students are on track to graduate career and college ready. Scores can be used to identify students who may benefit from extra help or additional challenge. Scores will not affect students' report card grades and will not be used as the sole factor in determining their advancement to the next grade level. The new accountability plan will specify additional ways students will be held accountable.

HOW WILL SCHOOLS SUPPORT STUDENTS DURING THE TRANSITION?

Schools are adopting a variety of methods to assist students who are struggling with the new standards. Additional support may be provided through remedial courses, summer courses, before- or after-school programs, in-class adjustments based on classroom performance and assessments, pull-out tutoring, and other strategies.



TAKE ACTION:

Parents need to pay close attention to the new accountability system 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. New Jersey leaders 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 assessments in general, please call the Department of Education at 877-900-6960 and ask for the Office of Assessment or Accountability.

HERE ARE SOME QUESTIONS THAT 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 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 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, 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.
- View samples of new test questions and get more information regarding how PARCC assessments were developed at www.parcconline.org
- Read all comments written by the teacher 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 your child's 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 the CCSS mean at each grade level, visit: www.pta.org/parentsguide
- For more information on assessments in New Jersey, visit: www.state.nj.us/education/sca/
- For information on the PARCC consortium, of which New Jersey is a member, visit: www.parcconline.org