

A Family Guide

to Understanding California's New Testing System: Part I California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress

This spring marks the second year of the new state testing program called the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP). Like last year, students in grades 3-8 and 11 will take tests in English-language arts and mathematics online using a computer. These tests are also known as the Smarter Balanced Assessments. Students in grades 5, 8, and 10 will also take paper and pencil science tests made up of multiple-choice questions. In the next few years, these will be changing to online tests, and other tests in other subjects like history-social science, art, and technology will also be added.

The CAASPP system is designed to give information to teachers, students, and their families about what students know and are able to do and whether they are on track to be ready for success in college or career when they graduate from high school. Test results will help identify and address gaps in knowledge or skills early on so students get the support they need to be ready for success in higher grades.

This Guide was developed by the Center for Student Assessment and Program Accountability at the Sacramento County Office of Education for use by schools and school districts in communicating with their families about state testing in spring 2015.

New Standards Require New Tests • • • • •

California's new standards (i.e., Common Core State Standards or CCSS) set higher expectations for our students than ever before. These higher expectations were carefully developed by classroom teachers, community colleges, colleges, universities, and leaders in the workforce. They represent the skills that today's students need to succeed in college, career, and life. Skills like critical thinking, problem solving, and strong writing so that our children are competitive with peers from around the world. Measuring these skills requires different types of test questions.

Test Results Will Be Reported This Spring • • • • •

Last year, students in California participated in what was called a field test, or a "test of the test." That means students who participated tried out the new technology being used to give the test (computers, laptops, tablets). They also tried out the test questions. Most importantly, last year's field test gave students and their teachers a chance to have a trial run with the new testing system. That experience gave students and teachers the confidence needed to help them succeed this spring. Because last year's field test was a "test of the test", results were not given for individual students, classrooms, or schools. This is the first year that results will be given to individual students, their families, and their teachers.

Results Set New Baseline for Student Achievement • • • •

Results from the new tests are measured differently and cannot be compared to results from the previous Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program. Because the tests in each system measure different things in different ways, comparing their results would be like comparing apples to oranges. Think of this year as us hitting the reset button. This year's results will set a new starting point for student achievement, against which we can compare performance for years to come.

New Test Results Are Just One Measure • • • • •

You receive information about how your child is doing in school through grades on tests and classroom assignments, as well as by talking with your child's teacher. The new test results will give you another piece of information about how well your child is learning what is expected for his or her grade and how well your child is doing compared to other students in the same grade.

Think of the test results as one part of an academic "wellness" check for your child – similar to when you take your child to the doctor for their annual checkups. The test results, combined with all the other information you have about your child, give you a good sense of where your child is doing well and where he or she might benefit from some extra help. And, most importantly this information will give insight into your child's readiness for college and career early enough to address any areas where he or she might need extra support.

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 older children, explain that the new tests were created to help him or her better prepare for college and career.
- Explain to your child that the new tests will be more challenging the first few times they take them.
- Tell your child that you and his or her teacher have high expectations and that you are both there to help them every step of the way.
- Review test results with your child, bringing your child's teacher into the discussion as necessary.
- Make sure your child gets a good night's sleep and a nutritious breakfast before testing.

* Source: National PTA "Parents' Guide to New Assessments in California"

For More Information

Your child's teacher or principal is the best place to start if you have other questions about testing this spring.

Additional questions and answers about the CAASPP system can be found on the California Department of Education's Web site at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/sbcommonqa.asp>. Parents can also find other information on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Web page at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org>.

Online Tests Engage Students and Provide Personalized Experiences

Students use technology all the time so taking the tests online will be familiar for them. Unlike paper and pencil tests that have mostly multiple choice questions, the online tests give students many different types of questions that allow students to interact with the test questions in new and different ways. For some of the math questions, for example, your child might be asked to drag and drop things from one place on the screen to another or draw a graph to solve a problem. Taking the tests online also allows students to use different tools that they might need like a calculator on some math problems, a glossary when taking the reading part of the test, or a highlighter that they can use to highlight important parts of a long paragraph.

These online tests are called "computer-adaptive." That means they adjust the difficulty of the questions based on the answers that students give. Unlike paper and pencil testing where most students were given the exact same test with the exact same questions, the online tests give different testing experiences for every student. As students answer questions correctly, they receive more challenging questions. Incorrect answers trigger easier questions. This feature helps keep students engaged, shortens testing time for many students, and provides more accurate results especially for low or high achieving students.

Grades and Subjects for Spring 2015 Testing

The table below shows the subjects and grade levels where students will be tested. For example, if your student is in 5th grade, they will take tests this spring in English-language arts, mathematics, and science. A student in 9th grade will not take any state tests this spring as part of the CAASPP system.

Subject Area	Grades Tested	Test Type
English-language Arts	Grades 3-8 and 11*	Computer-adaptive
Mathematics	Grades 3-8 and 11*	Computer-adaptive
Science	Grades 5, 8, and 10	Paper and Pencil

* It is also expected that for students in grade 11, results from the Smarter Balanced tests will tell them if they are ready for college-level coursework in English-language arts or mathematics—similar to what the results of the Early Assessment Program or EAP told students under the former STAR program.

Take the Test

Practice tests are available at <http://sbac.portal.airast.org/practice-test/>.

The practice tests can be taken by parents, teachers, students, and others and will give information about the type of test questions that students will see in different grades and subject areas. Go to the Web site address listed above and click on the green box that says "Student Interface Practice and Training Tests," and then click "Sign-In" on the next screen to get started.

Testing Schedule

Most schools will test their students between the middle of March and the middle of May. You will receive additional information from your school about the specific days and times of testing.