



2015 RESULTS FROM NEW STUDENT TESTS TO BE RELEASED

In September, the California Department of Education (CDE) is expected to publish the first report of California student achievement on the rigorous math and English-language arts/literacy standards known as the Common Core State Standards.¹ CDE will release statewide results from the new computer-based “summative” standards tests administered to students in grades 3–8 and grade 11 this past spring.² These standards and tests mark a significant change for schools and students, and overall, schools are at a relatively early stage of implementing them. This transition is important to keep in mind when evaluating the test results.

The State Board of Education adopted the standards in August 2010, and it took a few years for the state to approve new curriculum frameworks (guidance for how to teach the standards), endorse instructional materials, and develop other resources to help educators deliver the standards.³ Meanwhile, to implement the new standards, school districts had to adopt their own standards-aligned curricula, modify or purchase instructional materials, train teachers to teach the deeper content and more complex skills in the standards, and add computers and technology infrastructure into schools—all of which takes time and resources.⁴

¹ These test results are from the new standardized testing program called the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP). Results for schools, school districts, and the state overall will be available on CDE’s Web site. Parents will be mailed a report of their child’s scores. A sample student score report is at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/documents/caaspp15scorerpt.pdf>.

² About 1,800 students took a paper-and-pencil version of the tests because their schools did not have the technological capacity to administer the computer-based tests.

³ California’s standards implementation plan is at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/documents/ccssimpsysplanforcaoct2012.doc>.

⁴ The state 2013–14 budget included \$1.25 billion in one-time funding to assist K–12 local educational agencies (LEAs)—school districts, county offices of education, charter schools—and the State Special Schools in implementing the standards. In addition, the state provided about \$3.6 billion across two fiscal years (2014–15 and 2015–16) to reimburse LEAs for their costs of implementing state-mandated programs in prior years; this is discretionary funding the LEAs could spend for standards implementation. Also, the state 2015–16 budget included \$490 million in one-time funding for LEA activities that support educator effectiveness, and these funds may be used for professional development related to the standards, among other things.

A survey of about 800 districts in the fall of 2013 found districts were at various stages of implementing the standards then, and considerable work remained to bring the standards into classroom instruction.⁵ Notably, just more than half of the districts surveyed believed all their teachers understood the content of the standards, and nearly half of the districts had not developed curricula with classroom lessons aligned to the standards as of that time.

Based on that survey, researchers at the Public Policy Institute of California concluded last year that “many teachers will deliver the new standards for the first time in 2014–15, the first year of [standards] testing.”⁶ Full implementation of the standards in classrooms will take time and present certain challenges due to the size of our education system. As noted by State Board of Education President Michael Kirst in an interview published in *Education Week* last fall, “We’re making progress, districts are working hard, and we recognize it will take years to ensure all of our 280,000 teachers are well prepared. One of the most critical investments will continue to be providing support for teachers in classrooms.”⁷

Below are additional points to consider about the standards and tests.

The standards set higher expectations for students than in the past. Jointly developed by California and most other states, the standards define the subject matter knowledge and the real-world skills (critical thinking, analytical writing, and problem-solving) students need to be on track to graduate from high school ready for college or a career. Also, the standards were designed to: (1) promote deeper learning of key concepts, (2) connect concepts from kindergarten through grade 12, and (3) prepare students to compete internationally.

The standards-aligned tests also are more challenging, but they provide a better assessment of student knowledge and skills. The old standards tests used multiple-choice questions, but the new tests use more intricate questions, including performance tasks that require students to integrate their knowledge and skills. Besides being computer-based, the new tests also are computer-adaptive—meaning the difficulty of test questions is tailored to a student based on that student’s responses on prior questions—for more accurate assessment. In addition to the summative tests at the end of the school year, there also are new interim tests and other new resources that teachers can use to gauge student learning sooner and reteach material students didn’t master before.

⁵ About 80 percent of the districts in California responded to the survey. California County Superintendents Educational Services Association and Sacramento County Office of Education, “Common Core Standards Implementation Survey: Statewide Summary of Results,” November 2013.

⁶ Paul Warren and Patrick Murphy, “Implementing the Common Core State Standards in California,” Public Policy Institute of California, April 2014.

⁷ Marc Tucker, “The Common Core in California: An Interview with Mike Kirst,” *Education Week’s* blog, October 9, 2014.

Because the new tests are so different from the prior standards tests, the 2015 results cannot be reliably compared to past years' results. But, going forward, the new tests will show the progress students make over time in mastering the content and skills in the new standards. This is possible because the tests spanning grades 3–8 and grade 11 use a single vertical score scale that increases across the grades from a score of about 2,000 points to 3,000 points.

Focusing on progress is important. This year's results are expected to show a great need to raise student achievement in math and literacy. Previously, CDE reported, "Based on trial runs of the new assessments in California and other states, many if not most students will need to make significant progress to reach the standards set for math and literacy that accompany college and career readiness."⁸ Results should improve over time as more teachers become well-trained to deliver the standards and students have greater instruction under the standards and experience with the computer-based test format.

Unlike past years, school and school district test results won't be part of any state Academic Performance Index (API) this year. The API was suspended for two school years, 2013–14 and 2014–15, and the State Board of Education and the State Superintendent of Public Instruction have expressed their desire that the API be replaced with a new, multiple-measure accountability system that has yet to be developed. While there is no state-level accountability tool right now, school districts must include their test results in their local control and accountability plans (LCAPs), and schools will report their results in their School Accountability Report Cards (SARCs).

Many other states also administered these same tests in 2015. California is part of a collaborative of states called the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), which developed these tests. Most of the SBAC-member states administered the tests this year, and a few other states did, too. The 17 other states that also administered the tests are: Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Maine, Michigan, Missouri, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, Vermont, Washington, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.⁹ When comparing test results across these states, it will be important to heed any guidance CDE or SBAC provide about making such comparisons. Besides student demographics, there may be other issues to consider when comparing these test results.

⁸ In spring 2014, students in California and other states took a trial run, or field test, of the new tests. The field test didn't produce individual student scores, but it yielded estimates of aggregate student scores that are posted on CDE's Web site. CDE's comment about expected test results based on the field test is available at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/re/ht/caasppfaq.asp>.

⁹ The U.S. Virgin Islands and the Bureau of Indian Education also are members of the SBAC, and they also administered these tests in 2015. CDE provided the list of entities that administered the tests. For more information about the SBAC and its member states, see <http://www.smarterbalanced.org>.

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