

PARENTS' GUIDE TO New Tests in Georgia

In 2010, Georgia adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts and mathematics and incorporated them into the existing Georgia Performance Standards (GPS). Georgia's new state-mandated set of standards is called the College and Career Ready Georgia Performance Standards (CCGPS). CCGPS provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn in language arts and mathematics as they progress through grades K-12.

For the 2014-15 school year, Georgia will begin rolling out new assessments aligned to the CCGPS. The new assessments will be used to gauge how well students are mastering the standards and, ultimately, how ready students are to succeed in college and careers.

WHAT ARE THE COLLEGE AND CAREER READY STANDARDS?

Georgia's new standards in language arts and mathematics are designed to enhance and improve student learning by providing 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. 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 conceptual and critical thinking as well as fundamental skills. The CCGPS 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.

Common Core standards 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. Georgia was active in the development of the Common Core, and many of the new CCSS reflect the knowledge, content, and skills included in the Georgia Performance Standards.

In 2012, Georgia began implementing the CCGPS in each district, school, and classroom. To prepare educators, the state has offered teachers and administrators a wide range of educational and collaborative activities, including face-to-face workshops, webinars, online courses, and new resources for customization and use in classrooms.

THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

- Overview of new assessments, which measure student proficiency against more rigorous standards
- Sample test items
- Overview of accountability for students, teachers, and schools
- Additional resources for parents

Georgia's New Tests

WHY GIVE STATE TESTS IN THE FIRST PLACE?

State tests are given to measure how well students have learned content based on academic standards. Results from these tests are used to determine where students may need help or accelerated learning opportunities, as well as for school and district accountability.

WHY NEW ASSESSMENTS?

Teachers and principals talk a lot about assessments that are used to measure students' academic achievement. This document highlights the end-of-year summative assessments that gauge student progress toward mastering state standards and inform educational 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?

Students will be asked not only what the answer is to a question, but why – i.e. how they know or what evidence supports their answer. Open-ended items (also known as constructed-response) ask students to provide both short answer and extended types of responses. Multiple-choice questions will also still be included.

The new assessments will enable educators to deepen their understanding of student progress from one grade to the next – 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.

Language arts assessments will demonstrate:

- Whether students can read and comprehend texts of varying complexities
- How well students can use information from multiple sources to effectively summarize key points or make a persuasive argument
- The degree to which students can use context to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary

Math assessments will 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 mathematical 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. 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 tests will replace pencil and paper. (In the short term, exceptions will be made for schools that do not yet have the technology). Computer-based assessments are more efficient, innovative, and engaging.
- New assessments will allow Georgia to compare student performance across schools and districts statewide, as well as provide information about how Georgia students compare with their peers nationally.
- The new assessments will be designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English learners. Test administration accommodations will be available for eligible students, when needed. The intention is not to give these students an advantage, but to provide the accessibility needed for accurate results.

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 post-secondary 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.

What Parents Can Expect

This is a new assessment. Therefore, it is not possible to directly compare the scores on the new test with your student's scores from previous years.

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 will schools support students during the transition?

Schools have created a variety of models to assist students who are struggling with the standards. Parents should collaborate with teachers and administrators to develop a plan as needed.

 **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.

What is the accountability plan?

The state will continue to hold schools and teachers accountable for student achievement and year-over-year progress using new assessment scores as one factor in determining ratings. When assessments are implemented in 2014-15, the state will set a new baseline on which to further refine proficiency

targets, as well as promotion, retention, and remediation policies. Parents should work with local schools and teachers to understand these policies and develop any strategies needed to support a child who is not reaching proficiency.

Assessment results will be carefully monitored to ensure that the right professional development opportunities are being provided for educators, along with targeted support for students.

Holding schools accountable for college and career readiness

State assessment scores are utilized in calculating a school's College and Career Ready Performance Index (CCRPI) score in the following manner:

ACHIEVEMENT

The Achievement score will be made up of three indicators: Content Mastery (40%), Post Elementary/Middle/High School Readiness (30%), and Graduation Rate/Graduation Rate Predictor (30%)

- **Content Mastery:** This section looks at student achievement on state tests to determine how well a school is doing with instruction.
- **Post Elementary/Middle/High School Readiness:** This section looks at areas that have proven to help students be prepared for the next level.
- **Graduation Rate/Graduation Rate Predictor:** This section looks at a school's 4-year graduation rate.

PROGRESS

The Progress score will be calculated based on the percentage of a school's students demonstrating typical or high growth as indicated by their Student Growth Percentiles (SGP).

ACHIEVEMENT GAP

The Achievement Gap score assigns points to schools for their progress in closing or having small achievement gaps on state tests between schools' lowest 25% of achievers and the state average.

CHALLENGE POINTS

Points may be awarded to a school based on the performance on state assessments of three subgroups (Economically Disadvantaged, English Learners, and Students With Disabilities) in comparison to predefined Performance Targets.

Sample questions by grade level

The following questions are representative of those found on the new assessments.

EXAMPLE OF A 3RD GRADE MATH QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

Hector is studying his multiplication facts through the product of 10×10 .

Part A

Hector says that any multiple of 6 can be divided into 3 equal groups. Is Hector correct? Explain your answer using words, symbols, or pictures.

Part B

Hector finds the product of 4 and 7 by solving the expression $14 + 14$. Explain how $14 + 14$ can be used to find the product of 4 and 7.

EXAMPLE OF A 6TH GRADE ELA QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

Read the passage “Kayaking for Fun and Sport.”

1. Give three details from the passage to explain and support how kayaking became a sport and recreational activity. Answer with complete sentences and use correct punctuation and grammar.
2. Write a narrative in which a kayaker meets a person in a canoe and the two compare their watercrafts. Use details from the text to support your answer and use correct punctuation and grammar.



EXAMPLE OF AN 11TH GRADE ENGLISH QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

Read an excerpt from the novel “Pride and Prejudice” by Jane Austen and answer the following:

11. Write a paragraph in which you describe, in detail, the tone of the excerpt, using specific examples to support your description. Be sure to discuss any shifts or differences in tone throughout the excerpt as well as the purpose that is served by the style and use of the language

Use details from the text to support your answer. Answer with complete sentences, and use correct punctuation and grammar.

Answer:

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 provide information to help ensure he or she is on track to succeed after graduation and to identify any issues early enough to give more support where needed.
- Explain to your child that the tests will initially be more challenging. You may wish to discuss with your child why high expectations are important 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.
- Remind your student of the importance of reading directions carefully and not rushing through a test.
- Don't schedule appointments, trips or other interruptions during testing.

Staying informed and involved

- 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 any concerns.
- 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 a single test score does not represent all that your child can or cannot do. It is a snapshot only. Test scores are useful but should not be the only factor in determining a student's academic growth.

Additional Resources

- For a more detailed look at what the standards mean at each grade level, visit: www.pta.org/parentsguide.
- For more information on College and Career Ready Georgia Performance Standards, visit: www.georgiastandards.org.
- For more information on Georgia's new state assessments, visit: www.gadoe.org/Curriculum-Instruction-and-Assessment/Assessment/Pages/default.aspx.