

A photograph of two young girls in a classroom. The girl on the left has a yellow pencil balanced on her forehead and is looking down at a book. The girl on the right is looking towards the camera.

PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW ASSESSMENTS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

In July 2010, South Carolina adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). 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.

In the 2014-15 school year, South Carolina will begin rolling out new assessments aligned to the Common Core. The new assessments will be used to gauge how well students are mastering the standards – and, ultimately, how ready they are to succeed in college and careers.

WHAT ARE COMMON CORE STANDARDS?

Common Core Standards 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 not only rote skills, but also conceptual and critical thinking. The CCCS 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.

To date, more than 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core.

Since their adoption, South Carolina has been implementing CCSS changes in each district, school, and classroom. To prepare educators, South Carolina has provided a wide range of trainings, resources, and online tools to help schools and teachers align curricula with the new standards and build capacity in the instructional strategies that will support the new standards.

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 SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS?

The new assessments 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.

ELA assessments will 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 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 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 eventually 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.
- The new assessments will be designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners.

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.

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



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 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. Parents should collaborate with teachers and administrators to develop a plan as needed.

How are students and teachers held accountable?

Once the new assessments are implemented in 2014-15, South Carolina will revise its accountability plan. The plan, along with new school accountability procedures, will also specify the ways students who do not meet proficiency levels will be held accountable.

In the immediate future, even if a student does not meet proficiency levels, there should be no negative consequences such as holding him or her back a year. Instead, 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 are measured against student progress throughout the year. In the meantime, teacher evaluation criteria will remain the same.



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. The State 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 call the Department of Education at 803-734-8500 and ask for the Office of Assessment and/or Accountability or call the South Carolina Education Oversight Committee at 803-734-6148. 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?

Below is the list of policies and practices that National PTA supports. Check with the Department of Education to determine if South Carolina's policies and practices are aligned.






- National PTA believes that valid assessment does not consist of only a single test score, and that at no time should a single test be considered the sole determinant of a student's academic or work future.
- Policy alternatives to social promotion and grade retention must be established.
- The National PTA supports nationally agreed upon voluntary standards if they are derived by consensus at the state and local levels. Parents must be involved in this process.
- National PTA opposes federal legislation and/or regulations that mandate standardized testing or would lead to such testing, as well as federal policies that mandate comparisons of states, school districts, or individual schools and student retention based on a single test or sole criterion and the practice of social promotion.
- Standardized multiple-choice tests and school readiness tests should never be used with preschool and early elementary children for any purpose.

Sample questions by grade level

EXAMPLE OF A 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 A 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 A 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:

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 ensure 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

- Read all comments written by teachers 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. Assessment scores 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 your child prepare for tests and to improve your child's proficiency in skills called for in the Common Core Standards.

Additional Resources

- For more detailed look at what CCSS mean at each grade level, visit: www.pta.org/parentsguide
- For information on the implementation of CCSS in South Carolina, visit: www.ed.sc.gov