

#1. It's a New Test – Junior High and High School

As we move into spring, we are nearing the time when students will participate in the annual state tests.

This year, teachers at [Name of School] are helping students learn and presenting course information in new ways. We are using challenging tasks that require students to provide reasoning, support arguments with evidence, and persevere in solving problems. These are the skills that colleges and employers say our students need to succeed.

The next step is measuring our progress by participating in the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP). These new statewide tests for students in grades 3-8 and grade 11 are an academic check-up in English language arts/literacy and mathematics. These tests have replaced our former tests to provide better information to help improve teaching practices and target learning. The test is different from past testing in many ways. Some highlights include:

- **Computer Based:** Some questions are interactive, and a greater variety of supporting tools can be provided to eligible students, such as magnification of text, and text-to-speech read-aloud of questions.
- **Computer Adaptive:** Students receive test questions that help pinpoint what they know and can do. A correct answer is followed by a more difficult question, and an incorrect answer is followed by an easier question. This provides a more precise estimate of student understanding.
- **Realistic Context for Tasks:** Knowledge is assessed in context—for example, students are asked to select a word of the same meaning to replace a word in a paragraph, rather than to choose a synonym for a word standing alone. In addition, students will need to provide open-ended answers for some questions, rather than selecting from multiple options, and will be asked to write short essays that will need to be scored by hand.
- **No Time Limits:** Students can take the time they need to do their best.

Check in with your child after he or she has completed testing, and ask him or her to share with you some of their experiences with this new approach.

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#1. It's a New Test—Elementary

As we move into spring, we are nearing the time when students will participate in the annual state test.

This year, teachers at [Name of School] are helping students learn in new ways. We are using challenging, grade-level appropriate tasks that ask students to provide reasoning, support arguments with evidence, and persevere in solving problems. These are the skills our students need to develop over the course of their education to succeed in the long run.

The next step is measuring our progress by participating in the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP). These new statewide tests for students in grades 3-8 and grade 11 are an academic check-up in English language arts/literacy and mathematics. These tests have replaced our former tests to provide better information to help improve teaching and learning.

The test is different from past testing in many ways. Some highlights include:

- **Computer Based:** Some questions are interactive, and a greater variety of supporting tools can be provided to eligible students, such as magnification of text, and text-to- speech read-aloud of questions.
- **Computer Adaptive:** Students receive test questions that help pinpoint what students know and can do. A correct answer is followed by a more difficult question, and an incorrect answer is followed by an easier question. This provides a more precise estimate of student understanding.
- **Realistic Context for Tasks:** Knowledge is assessed in context—for example, students are asked to select a word of the same meaning to replace a word in a paragraph, rather than to choose a synonym for a word standing alone. In addition, students will need to provide open-ended answers for some questions, rather than selecting from multiple options, and will be asked to write short essays that will need to be scored by hand.
- **No Time Limits:** Students can take the time they need to do their best.

Check in with your child after he or she has completed testing, and ask him or her to share with you some of their experiences with this new approach. If you are interested in an even closer look, you can take a practice test to sample the new problems and experience the tools that are available to support students. Take a look at the link below:

- [Take a Practice Test](#)

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- [Computer Adaptive Testing Factsheet](#)

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#2. Classroom Activities—All Levels

As we move through the administration period for the annual statewide test, your child may be coming home with stories about a part of the test that includes a group activity in the classroom. I'm sure that many of you are thinking, "Since when has group work been allowed on state tests?"

The California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) English language arts/literacy and mathematics tests include "performance tasks," extended problem-solving exercises that require students to use multiple skills to demonstrate understanding. Students are provided with articles, text excerpts, videos, or diagrams, and then asked to analyze and synthesize them to solve the problem. To help students prepare for these performance tasks, teachers will lead students through a prescribed classroom activity to introduce the students to the vocabulary and context for the task. The activity is solely an orientation, designed to make the topic more familiar and accessible, and it is not scored. To learn more about classroom activities and performance tasks, click the links below:

- [Descriptions of Performance Tasks and Classroom Activities](#)
- [Performance Task Writing Rubrics](#) (view sample tasks, associated classroom activities, and scoring guides at this link).

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#3. Test Results Are Not the Only Measure—All Levels

When making critical decisions in our lives, we usually do not rely on only one set of information. For example, when buying a car, we consider the price of the car, whether we think the car is attractive, the reputation of the car company, advice from owners of similar cars, and a host of other indicators of the car's quality. Similarly, when assessing what students know and can do, it is important to rely on more than one measure of students' content knowledge and skills.

Scores for the annual statewide test will soon become available. We will use these scores as just one piece of information. Classroom projects, writing assignments, math exercises, and our own tests given throughout the year all contribute important information as we build a clear picture of how each student is progressing. As you assess your child's progress, I recommend that you too consider the annual state test scores just one piece of information. Take a look at your child's classroom accomplishments as well as the scores, and use this complete body of information when helping your child set goals for improvement.

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#4. When the Scores Come This Summer—Elementary & Junior High

This summer, you will receive your child's results on the annual statewide test. Given that this year's test is new, you should consider these results a baseline for marking future growth. As we have discussed in recent newsletters, we are in a transition period—we have identified new skills that students should master, we have been teaching those skills in new and novel ways, and now we are assessing progress with a new test. The scores on this test will not be comparable to last year's annual test scores, as the old test assessed a different set of skills. Additionally, we have raised expectations for what students should be able to do, so this year's results may show that most students will need to make substantial progress to master the desired skills. This is OK because we are headed in the right direction. As students spend more time with the new curriculum, their skills will improve.

When you receive these test results, please support your child in areas that seem to be more challenging, and take time to celebrate all of the different ways in which your child has grown this year. If you have any questions about interpreting the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress score report, please feel free to contact me, or look to the following resources for more information:

- [Smarter Balanced Reporting System Overview](#) (PDF)
- [Achievement Level Descriptors](#) (PDF)

4. When the Scores Come This Summer—High School

This summer you will receive your child's results on the annual statewide test. As we have discussed in recent newsletters, we are in a transition period—we have identified new skills that students should master, we have been teaching those skills in new and novel ways, and now we are assessing progress with a new test. The scores on this test will not be comparable to last year's annual test scores, as the old test assessed a different set of skills. Additionally, we have raised expectations for what students should be able to do, so this year's results may show that many students need to make substantial progress to master the desired skills.

You will receive a score report that describes your child's achievement based on four levels: Standard Exceeded, Standard Met, Standard Nearly Met, and Standard Not Met.

Students who score at the Standard Exceeded level are considered ready for college-level coursework, and are exempt from taking the California State University (CSU) and participating California Community College placement tests. In most cases, this will eliminate the need for your student to take a placement test when they enter college and will spare them the time and extra expense of taking non-credit catch-up courses

Students who score at the Standard Met level are conditionally ready for college-level coursework, and are encouraged to take appropriate courses in their senior year to move directly to college-level courses.

Students who score at the Standard Nearly Met or Standard Not Met levels are not yet demonstrating readiness for college-level coursework. That does not mean that he or she should not attend college. Rather, he or she may need to take a placement test when enrolling, and may need to take non-credit courses to acquire the knowledge and skills needed to succeed. We will work with your child to help him or her make as much progress as possible.

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Please feel free to reach out to me or to your child's counselor to discuss how we can work together to help your child progress.