



PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW ASSESSMENTS IN RHODE ISLAND

In July 2010, Rhode Island 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 2014-2015 school year, Rhode Island will begin rolling out new assessments aligned to the CCSS to gauge how well students are mastering the standards – and ultimately how ready students are to succeed in college and careers.

Approximately 20 percent of students in Rhode Island schools will participate in field-testing the new assessments in spring 2014, and each student will complete only part of the assessments. Although no results will be reported, students are encouraged to try their best when completing the assessment. Field testing will help the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) create high-quality questions that are free of bias and that challenge students working at all performance levels. For more information about PARCC see section “Benefits of new assessments.”

Districts and schools are expected to fully implement the CCSS during the 2013-2014 school year. During the transition period, schools will continue to administer the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) Reading, Writing, and Mathematics tests, which will remain aligned with the current expectations, in the fall of 2013. This transition process is designed to be fair to educators and students and to maintain the quality of the information provided by the tests.

WHAT ARE THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS (CCSS)?

Common Core State Standards are designed to enhance and improve student learning. CCSS have greater clarity and rigor than previous standards. They are 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. CCSS 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.

The Common Core State 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 CCSS.

After adopting the new standards in July 2010, Rhode Island began implementing CCSS changes in each district, school, and classroom. To prepare educators, Rhode Island has provided professional development opportunities for educators to study the standards and develop aligned curriculum. Rhode Island developed a transition plan to ensure that all schools are fully implementing a curriculum that is aligned with the CCSS. In particular, the Rhode Island Department of Education is working to build teachers' capacity to deliver high-quality, differentiated, data-driven instruction aligned with the standards.

THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

- Overview of new assessments, which measure student proficiency against more rigorous standards
- Sample questions
- Overview of accountability for schools, students and teachers
- 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 summative assessments, which judge student progress toward mastering state standards and program and school effectiveness. For other types of assessments used, see box at right.

The new assessments require problem-solving and critical thinking. In that way they will be similar to the NECAP assessments, which Rhode Island has used for the past eight years. NECAP assessments also require students to show their thinking and reasoning through many written responses. In addition, Rhode Island is one of the few states that has consistently administered a statewide writing assessment.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT THE NEW ASSESSMENTS?

The new assessments 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: Assessments administered during instruction that are designed to evaluate students' knowledge and skills relative to a specific set of goals to inform decisions in the classroom and beyond

Summative: Formal assessments that are given at the end of a unit, term, course, or academic year

This document addresses summative assessments.

English Language Arts (ELA) assessments 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 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

- Over the next few years, assessment results will be provided more and 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 each child's needs.
- Computer-based assessments will 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.
- New assessments will allow Rhode Island to compare student performance across schools and districts statewide, as well as with students in other states that have adopted the Common Core.
- School districts will have access to sample questions and online practice tests to help parents prepare their children for assessments.
- The new assessments are designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners. Online assessments can address visual, auditory, and physical access barriers for students with disabilities, while enabling them to take tests at the same time as others in their class. English language learners will be able to demonstrate knowledge in the various content areas (e.g., math, science, and social science), regardless of their level of proficiency in English. The intention is not to give these students an advantage, but to provide the accessibility needed for accurate results.

Who is developing the new assessments?

Because CCSS is a state-led initiative, most states chose to join one of two consortia of states working together to develop new assessments based on Common Core State Standards. These are SMARTER Balanced and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC).

Rhode Island is a member of PARCC, along with 20 other states and territories. States make all customization and final decisions about assessments working with committees of local educators. Read more about PARCC at: www.parcconline.org.

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.

Sample questions by grade level

The following questions are representative of those found on the new assessments. For more examples, visit www.parcconline.org/samples/item-task-prototypes.

EXAMPLE OF A 4TH GRADE MATH QUESTION

Three classes at Lakeview School are going on a field trip. The Table shows the number of people in each class, including the teacher.

They can choose to use buses, vans, and cars.



Buses have 20 seats



Vans have 16 seats



Cars have 5 seats

	Total number of people
Mrs. Ruiz's Class	23
Mr. Yangs's Class	25
Mrs. Evan's Class	24

Which three combinations can be used to take all three classes on a field trip?

- 1 bus and 4 vans
- 3 vans and 11 cars
- 1 bus and 1 van and 6 cars
- 1 bus and 8 cars
- 2 buses and 3 vans and 4 cars

Submit Answer

EXAMPLE OF A 6TH GRADE ELA QUESTION

Students are asked to read a passage from the fictional text "Julie of the Wolves" by Jean C. George and answer the following:

SAMPLE ITEM

In the passage, the author developed a strong character named Miyax. Think about Miyax and the details the author used to create the character. The passage ends with Miyax waiting for the black wolf to look at her.

Write an original story to continue where the passage ended. In your story, be sure to use what you have learned about the character Miyax as you tell what happens to her next.

Answer:

EXAMPLE OF A 10TH GRADE ELA QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

Use what you have learned from reading "Daedalus and Icarus" by Ovid and "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph" by Anne Sexton to write an essay that provides an analysis of how Sexton transforms Daedalus and Icarus.

As a starting point, you may want to consider what is emphasized, absent, or different in the two texts, but feel free to develop your own focus for analysis.

Develop your essay by providing textual evidence from both texts. Be sure to follow the conventions of standard English.

Answer:

What Parents Can Expect

This is a new system 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 to students' futures, including problem solving, writing, and critical thinking. The scores provide students, parents, and teachers with the ability to address issues well before students are ready to graduate.

Because rigor is higher, 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.

How will schools support students during the transition?

Schools have created a variety of models to assist students who are struggling with the standards. The assessments will provide teachers with timely information that will guide instruction, including differentiated instruction. If children experience a dip in progress or state test results, don't hesitate to discuss this with their teachers and to work with the school to develop a plan for enrichment or improvement.

Student performance on the current state assessment is one component of high school graduation requirements in Rhode Island. As Rhode Island transitions to the PARCC assessment in 2014-2015, the Rhode Island Department of Education will determine how the new PARCC assessments will be included in these graduation requirements beginning with the 2017 graduating class. In the immediate future, even if a student does not meet proficiency levels, there will 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 can work with school or district curriculum directors to learn about the new curriculum and understand how they can support their children to minimize any dips in assessment scores.



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 on assessments in general, please call the Office of Instruction, Assessment, and Curriculum at 401-222-4600. Here are some questions that 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?

How are students and teachers held accountable?

Once the new assessments are implemented in 2014-15, the Rhode Island Department of Education 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.

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 make sure 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 might initially be more challenging than previous tests. 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

- Become familiar with the Common Core State Standards.
- View samples of new test questions and get more information regarding how PARCC assessments were developed at www.parcconline.org.
- 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 comments.
- 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 tests are not perfect measures of what a child can do. Scores can be affected by the way he or she is feeling on test day or the particular classroom setting. Assessments 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 prepare for tests and improve your child's proficiency.

Additional Resources

- For more detailed look at what CCSS mean at each grade level: www.pta.org/parentsguide
- For more information on assessments in Rhode Island: www.ride.ri.gov/InstructionAssessment/Overview.aspx
- For information on the PARCC consortium, of which Rhode Island is a member: www.parcconline.org/