

# PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW Assessments in Florida

In 2010, Florida adopted the new world-class Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which Florida customized to meet the state's needs and which now inform the more rigorous Florida Standards. Florida Standards provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn in English language arts and mathematics as they progress through grades K–12.

In the 2014–15 school year, Florida will be rolling out new assessments aligned to the new standards. The assessments will be used to gauge how well students are mastering the Florida Standards—and, ultimately, how ready they are for college and further career education.

## WHAT ARE THE COMMON CORE STANDARDS ON WHICH THE FLORIDA STANDARDS ARE BASED?

The CCSS 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 procedural skills, but also conceptual and critical thinking. The 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 CCSS 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. They are not a set of federal standards. Florida has taken best practices from the CCSS and integrated them into a set of standards specifically tailored to our state's unique needs.

In the 2012–13 school year, Florida implemented standards changes in each district, school, and classroom. To prepare educators, Florida has implemented a range of professional development opportunities.

## THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

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

# 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 ASSESSMENTS?

The new assessments will enable educators to deepen their understanding of student progress from grade to grade—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.*

## English language arts 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. 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.

## 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 samples of those that students might find on the new assessments. Florida is still developing the framework and final questions for its assessments.

## 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 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 WILL 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. Remediation and summer courses, in-class adjustments based on ongoing in-class assessment results, and pull-out tutoring are just a few support strategies.



#### 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 STUDENTS AND TEACHERS BE HELD ACCOUNTABLE?

Once the new assessments are implemented in school year 2014–15, the Florida 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.

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. Florida 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 Florida Department of Education at (850) 245 -0513. 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?

# 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 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. 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 CCSS.

## Additional Resources

- For a more detailed look at what the CCSS mean at each grade level, visit: [www.pta.org/parentsguide](http://www.pta.org/parentsguide).
- For more information on the Florida Standards, as well as an opportunity to provide feedback or sign up for updates, visit: <http://www.flstandards.org>.
- For more information on teacher, student, and school accountability, visit: <http://www.fldoe.org/arm>.