

PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW ASSESSMENTS IN IDAHO

Since 2002, all states have adopted content standards in core subject areas. These standards set the goals for what each child should know and be able to do by the end of each grade. Since 2002, standards have been developed at the state level so they have varied greatly in each state.

WHAT ARE THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS (CCSS)?

In 2009, Idaho adopted the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which 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.

CCSS were developed through a state-led initiative, spearheaded by governors and state superintendents in collaboration with teachers, school administrators, college faculty, parents, and education experts. They build on the excellent foundation laid by states to date and have been internationally benchmarked to ensure rigor on par with top-performing nations.

CCSS have greater clarity than most previous standards and 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 standards are not a curriculum. Decisions about curriculum, tools, materials, and textbooks are left to local districts and schools that know their students best.

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

In 2013, Idaho began implementing the standards in each district, school, and classroom. To prepare educators, Idaho is providing workshops, educational resources, webinars, and other ongoing professional development activities.

NEW ASSESSMENTS

In the 2014-15 school year, Idaho 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 for college and further career education and training. In spring 2014, all Idaho schools will participate in a national field test to ensure that the assessment process runs smoothly when new tests are administered in participating schools nationwide in 2015.

THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

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

Idaho Core Standards-Aligned Assessments

WHY NEW ASSESSMENTS?

Teachers and principals talk a lot about assessments, which are used to measure students' academic achievement and drive instruction. 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 the current state assessments – namely, that they measure the ability to memorize facts, rather than the skills students need to think critically and apply knowledge.

Idaho currently requires students to pass the Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT) in reading, language usage, and mathematics to graduate. The new end-of-year assessment aligned to the Idaho Core Standards will replace the ISAT and be used for this purpose.

WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT THE NEW SUMMATIVE ASSESSMENTS?

The new assessments for English language arts and math 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

Formative: An instructional process that provides real-time feedback to help adjust teaching and outcomes. Examples: non-graded pop-quiz, student reflection/discussion, diagrams, peer-review, teacher observation.

Interim: Periodic tests used to evaluate knowledge, skills, and standing at specific points in the curriculum. Examples: graded pop quiz, mid-term exam, district benchmark exam.

Summative: Tests given at the end of an instructional period/year to make final determinations about knowledge, skills, and standing. Examples: final exams, statewide accountability exams (ISAT).
This document addresses summative assessments.

New English language arts assessments

- Ask students to read more complex fiction and non-fiction texts and use evidence from these texts to answer questions, make inferences, and present persuasive arguments
- Emphasize literacy across all subjects, not just in English class
- Test writing at every grade level

New math assessments:

- Go beyond multiple-choice questions and present students with multi-step problems, conceptual questions, and real-world applications
- Ask students to not only get answers correct, but also explain how they arrived at those answers
- Cover fewer topics in greater depth, focusing on the most critical areas

Benefits of new assessments

- Scores provide students, parents, and teachers with insight into college and career readiness early enough to address issues and provide extra support where needed.
- While Idaho has had computer-based assessments for more than a decade, the state will transition to computer-adaptive assessments in 2015. On a computer-adaptive assessment, a student who answers a question correctly will receive a more challenging question, while an incorrect answer generates an easier question. This method provides students with a more engaging test experience, is more time-efficient, and—especially for low- or high-achieving students—produces more accurate results than traditional methods.
- New assessments will allow Idaho to compare student performance not only across schools and districts statewide, but also with other states that have adopted the Common Core. For years, we have been able to see how students at Boise High School are performing compared to their peers at Idaho Falls High School a few hundred miles away, but we have not been able to compare how they perform with students at Ontario High School in Oregon just 50 miles away. Why? Because Oregon had different standards.
- The new assessments are designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learning needs, allowing these students to perform to their potential. For students with disabilities, the online assessments will address visual, auditory, and physical access barriers. These students will be able to take a test individualized to meet their needs at the same time as other students in their class. Tools have also been developed to help English language learners demonstrate their knowledge, regardless of their level of proficiency in English. The goal of the accommodations is to make the assessments more accessible and to produce results that are valid for these students, not to give them an advantage over other students.

Please note: While Idaho has worked with a consortium of states to develop this assessment, it is ultimately up to Idaho to customize and administer this test.

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 the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). A few states have pursued test development on their own.

Idaho is a member of Smarter Balanced, along with more than 20 other states and territories. All customization and final decisions about assessments remain at the state level, in partnership with local educators. Read more about Smarter Balanced at: www.smarterbalanced.org.

College Readiness Defined:

Being college ready means being able to succeed in introductory courses at post-secondary institutions – those that are credit-bearing and transferable. In English Language Arts/Literacy this means demonstrating reading, writing, listening, and research skills, as well as knowledge of specific subject areas needed for entry-level English and composition courses. In Math, this means demonstrating foundational knowledge and quantitative reasoning skills, along with specific subject area knowledge (like Algebra) needed for entry-level math and statistics courses.






Sample questions by grade level

The following questions are representative of those found on the new assessments. For more examples, visit www.smarterbalanced.org/pilot-test.

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:

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 any issues well before students are ready to graduate.

Because the tests are more rigorous, we know the number of students performing at grade-level will likely not be the same as it was in the past. However, this will simply be a new baseline of data under the new standards. A dip should not be interpreted as a decline in student learning or educator performance. Any time we raise academic standards, we know it takes a few years for students to reach the new goal we have set for them. Every state will face a short-term dip in the number of students performing at grade level while teachers and students become more familiar with the standards and better equipped to meet the challenges they present.

How will students be held accountable?

Only high school students will be held accountable for their performance on the new assessments. These students will need to pass the new end-of-year assessment in 11th grade to meet the graduation requirement tied to testing. Retention, advancement, and grading decisions for students in grades 3-10 will not be made based on statewide test results. As in the past, the state and local school districts will continue to provide support to students in all grades who struggle to meet grade level on the new assessment.

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.

If Students Need Additional Help

If children struggle with the new standards, don't hesitate to discuss this with their teachers and to work with the school to develop a plan for enrichment or improvement.

How will teachers be held accountable?

Teachers will be held accountable to the new standards through regular evaluation at the district level. Parents should contact their districts to learn more about the plan for evaluating teacher performance.

How will schools be held accountable?

Schools will continue to be held accountable based on the measures in the Five-Star Rating System. These measures include student achievement on the new statewide tests, student growth toward grade-level proficiency, and opportunities for college preparation, including advanced coursework and success on college entrance exams like the SAT and ACT. Parents can learn more about the Five-Star Rating System by visiting the Idaho State Department of Education website at www.sde.idaho.gov/site/assessment/starRating.htm.



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.

Preparing and supporting your child

- Discuss the new tests with your child. Make sure he or she is not scared or anxious going into the new tests.
- With an older child, explain that the new assessments were created to help him or her better prepare for college and career.
- 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. 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 and a nutritious breakfast before a test.

Staying informed and involved

- Become familiar with the Idaho Core Standards. You can explore these standards on the State Department of Education website at www.sde.idaho.gov/site/ICS/.
- Explore practice tests through the interactive online platform at www.smarterbalanced.org/pilot-test/.
- Read all comments written by teachers on assignments, tests, and report cards. 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.
- Do not judge your child based on a single test score. Tests are not perfect measures of what a child can do. There are many other factors that might influence a test score. For example, a child can be affected by the way he or she is feeling on test day or the particular classroom setting.
- Meet with your child's teacher as often as possible to discuss his or her 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 the standards mean at each grade level: www.pta.org/parentsguide
- For more information on the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, of which Idaho is a governing member: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/>