



# PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW ASSESSMENTS IN OREGON

In Oregon, we want all of our students to be ready to compete in an increasingly competitive world. To ensure students are gaining the skills they need to succeed, Oregon adopted a new set of rigorous standards called the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The CCSS provide a consistent, clear understanding of what students are expected to learn in English Language Arts and Math as they progress through grades K-12. Oregon will start field testing new assessments aligned to these standards in the 2013-14 school year, with full implementation planned statewide in 2014-15. The new assessments will be used to gauge how well students are mastering the knowledge and skills that will prepare them for college and careers.

## WHAT ARE THE COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS (CCSS)?

The Common Core State Standards are designed to enhance and improve student learning. The CCSS have greater focus, clarity, and rigor than previous standards and are designed to identify the knowledge and skills young people will need for college and career success. This includes an emphasis on connecting content to relevant real-world applications. The standards have been benchmarked to national and international standards, 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 reasoning skills. 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.** The CCSS describe the knowledge, skills, and practices of students prepared for college and careers. Decisions about curriculum, instructional tools, materials, and textbooks are left to local decision makers who know their students best.

The CCSS were developed through a state-led initiative, spearheaded by governors and school chiefs, in

collaboration with teachers, school administrators, college faculty, parents, and education experts. They build on the excellent foundation laid across all states. To date, more than 45 states and the District of Columbia have adopted the Common Core Standards.

Oregon school districts are currently implementing the new standards, building on the good work that has been going on in our schools over the past several years to improve student opportunities and outcomes.

To prepare teachers and school administrators, the state has offered a range of training initiatives and has used a "train the trainer" model to make broader reach possible. Educators across the state have been immersed in webinars, in-person workshops, and school-based discussions to ensure they have the tools to implement these standards successfully.

## THIS GUIDE INCLUDES:

- An overview of new assessments that measure student proficiency against more rigorous standards
- Sample questions by grade level
- An overview of what this means for students, teachers, and schools
- Additional resources for parents

# CCSS-Aligned Assessments

In the 2013-14 school year, Oregon will field test new state assessments aligned to the Common Core. A full transition to new assessments — which will replace the current Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) in reading, writing, and math — will occur statewide during the 2014-15 school year.

## WHY NEW ASSESSMENTS?

Teachers and principals use assessments (or tests) to measure students' academic achievement and growth over time. The box to the right highlights the different types of assessments used to support and test student learning. This document focuses on the end-of-year summative assessments, which judge student progress toward mastering state standards and program and school effectiveness.

New summative assessments will address longstanding concerns that parents, educators, and employers have had about current state tests – namely that they measure students' ability to memorize facts, rather than the skills to think critically and apply knowledge.

## WHAT IS DIFFERENT ABOUT THE NEW ASSESSMENTS?

The new assessments for English Language Arts/Literacy 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

**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.*

## New English Language Arts/Literacy standards and 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 English
- Test writing at every grade level

## New Math standards and assessments

- Go beyond multiple-choice questions and present students with multi-step problems, conceptual questions, and real-world applications
- Ask students not only to get correct answers, 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.
- Oregon is ahead of most school systems across the nation, as it has already used online, adaptive assessments for a number of years. Computer-based assessments are more efficient, innovative, and engaging – and they provide teachers and parents with better information about whether a **student is on track to succeed in college or career or needs extra support**.
- The new standards and assessments will allow Oregon to compare student performance not only across schools and districts statewide, but also to other states using the new assessments. This will allow us to see, for the first time, how prepared our students are to compete with their peers from around the county.
- 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 also 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. This will provide the accessibility needed for accurate results.

## Who is developing the new assessments?

Because CCSS is a state-led initiative, most states across the country 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.

Oregon is a member of Smarter Balanced and has been actively involved in helping to lead the work to ensure the assessments meet the needs of Oregon students and schools. Read more about Smarter Balanced at: <http://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.

## EXAMPLE OF A 4TH GRADE ENGLISH QUESTION

### SAMPLE ITEM

Following is the beginning of a story that a student is writing for class. The story needs more details and an ending. Read the beginning of the story and then complete the task that follows.

#### Oliver's Big Splash

Oliver was a dog that lived in a small town near a lake. He loved to play outside. Oliver liked to play fetch, but his favorite thing to do was to chase leaves. He loved chasing leaves so much that his favorite time of year was fall when the leaves fell off the trees.

One beautiful fall day, Oliver and his owner, Jeff, went for a walk around the lake. They were enjoying the sunshine and the lake when suddenly a dragonfly flew past. For a moment, Oliver forgot where he and Jeff were and what they were doing. All of a sudden there was a big splash.

Write an ending for the story by adding details to tell what happens next.

## EXAMPLE OF A 7TH GRADE MATH QUESTION

### SAMPLE ITEM

A set contains the numbers 0, 5, 10, and 12.  
Two different numbers are selected randomly from this set.  
What is the probability that each of the given events will occur?

- A. Probability that the sum is greater than 11= \_\_\_\_\_
- B. Probability that the product is 0 = \_\_\_\_\_

## EXAMPLE OF A HIGHSCHOOL ENGLISH QUESTION

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.

### SAMPLE ITEM

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. :

## What parents can expect

This is a brand new, more rigorous set of standards with a new assessment. Therefore, it is not possible to directly compare new scores with previous OAKS scores.

What your child is being taught and the assessments measuring his or her mastery of the content are changing. These changes are designed to make instruction richer and more relevant and capture a deeper picture of student growth and achievement.

When we raise the bar, initial student achievement scores are generally lower than on the previous standard. This does not mean our students are doing worse in school; it simply means that we are asking more of our students to better prepare them for life after high school. When we have raised expectations in the past, we have generally seen initial drops in the percent of students meeting state standard. However, these short-term declines generally improve as teachers and students become more familiar with new standards and better equipped to meet the challenges they present.

### What students can expect

Better information about how prepared our students are for future success means that we can better target supports and interventions, get students back on track, or personalize instruction to better meet individual needs. If a student does not meet state standards, parents can work with the school to develop a personalized improvement plan, which might include such things as remediation, summer courses, tutoring, or adjustments to the style of instruction.

At the high school level, Oregon students will continue to have multiple ways in which to meet the Essential Skills graduation requirement. Failing to meet standard on the state assessment will not mean a student fails to graduate, provided the student can demonstrate a sufficient level of proficiency on another national test (ACT, SAT, etc.) or on a locally scored work sample.

## What teachers can expect

In addition to making sure we have rigorous and relevant standards to guide instruction in the classroom, we need to make sure that every classroom is led by a strong and well-trained teacher and that every school is led by a strong administrator. Oregon is implementing a new teacher evaluation system to help make sure that all teachers and administrators are receiving meaningful feedback and professional development so they can provide the strongest possible instruction and educational leadership. For more on Oregon's Educator Effectiveness efforts, go to: <http://www.ode.state.or.us/go/edeffectiveness>.

### What schools can expect

The state releases School and District Report Cards each October, and student performance and growth as demonstrated on state tests are a major component of the rating schools receive. Once Oregon begins testing aligned to the Common Core State Standards in 2014-15, the Report Cards will reflect student performance on these new tests.

The School and District Report Cards released in October 2013 look significantly different from Report Cards in the past. The Report Cards were redesigned based on input from parents, community members, and educators. New information has been added to better tell each school's story, and parents can use these Report Cards to explore how their local schools are doing in a range of areas.

Oregon is one of a number of states that received a waiver from the U.S. Department of Education from some of the mandates of the No Child Left Behind Act. The redesign of the Report Cards and the improved educator evaluation system are part of that waiver. This federal flexibility has allowed Oregon to create its own accountability system that better meets the needs of our schools and communities.

Schools are still accountable for student performance, but factors such as student growth — how much student learning occurs from year to year — are also an important piece of our new accountability system.

# Preparing and supporting your child

- Discuss the new standards and assessments with your child. Try to address any questions or concerns your child may have.
- With an older child, explain that the new standards were created to help him or her better prepare for college and career.
- Explain to your child that the work will initially be more challenging. Tell your child you have high expectations and that you are there to help every step of the way.
- Support your child by providing a quiet, comfortable place to do homework and practice skills. Read together (particularly non-fiction) and find ways to integrate math, reading, and writing practice into daily life.
- Help make learning fun!

## Staying informed and involved

- Become familiar with the Common Core State Standards.
- Explore practice tests through an interactive online platform: <http://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 support his or her learning and improve proficiency.

## Additional Resources

- For a more detailed look at what CCSS mean at each grade level, visit: <http://www.pta.org/parentsguides>
- For more information on the Smarter Balanced consortium, of which Oregon is a member, visit: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/>
- For more on Common Core in Oregon, visit:
  - <http://www.ode.state.or.us/go/commoncore>
  - <http://www.cgcs.org/Page/244>

