

Discussing CMAS at Parent/Teacher Conferences

Parent/teacher conferences are a great opportunity to discuss the new state tests, the Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS). Teachers should share insights one-on-one with parents about what to expect with this year's new tests.

Points to Consider Sharing

- The new tests measure new learning expectations outlined in the new standards (Colorado Academic Standards).
- Many Colorado teachers helped develop the new tests.
- The new tests will be given this year in:
 - Science: grades 5, 8 and 12
 - Social studies: grades 4, 7 and 12
 - English language arts: grades 3 through 11
 - Math: grades 3-8 and three times in high school
- These tests replace the old fill-in-the-bubble tests with new interactive and engaging tests taken online.
- Because these are different tests, they'll have different scores.
- New levels of achievement: distinguished command, strong command, moderate command and limited command.
- These new tests measure performance against higher expectations. With higher expectations, fewer students will initially achieve at the highest levels.
- With fewer students achieving at the highest levels at first, it doesn't mean students are suddenly performing worse. Rather, we've raised the bar of expectations.
- The new tests measure deeper learning and critical thinking skills.
- Students began taking new science & social studies in spring 2014; 12th graders took them last fall. All students will take English & math in March.

Different Types of Tests

Different types of tests are routinely given to students throughout the year. A balanced approach to testing gives teachers, parents and students ongoing feedback about student performance along the way. We want just enough feedback to know how well students are doing and not too much to overburden schools and students.

Here are the most commonly used types of tests.

Summative tests are given at the end of something – a course, unit or grade level – once all the instruction has happened and makes sure every student actually learned what they were supposed to throughout that timeframe. This is our evidence of learning.

Benchmark/Interim tests are given periodically throughout the year and happen “in the middle of learning” so teachers, students and parents can understand how well students are progressing and if there are any gaps in understanding so adjustments can be made to address the gaps.

Formative tests are similar to the interim tests, but much more informal. These quick checks allow teachers to see if students understand specific concepts and if there need to be adjustments in instruction so student best comprehend.

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