



COLORADO
Department of Education
Commissioner of Education

201 East Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203-1799

Aug. 12, 2021

Dear Superintendents and BOCES Directors,

I hope you are all got a chance to relax and enjoy the summer -- you all deserved a break after the extraordinary year we had last year. I can't believe it's already time for us to fasten our seat belts for the coming school year!

As usual, we have been incredibly busy preparing for [today's release of state-level CMAS, PSAT and SAT scores](#). I wanted to send you a quick note about the results and remind you of some of the context surrounding our tests last spring.

I know that the pandemic reshaped many aspects of education last year. You supported your students through a variety of models, including in-person, remote and hybrid instruction. I understand that in response to the pandemic, some of you may have adjusted or reduced the content covered during instruction from a typical year. Our state assessments, however, maintained the same expectations from previous years. As a result of last year's conditions, we anticipated some degree of impact on student achievement.

And we did indeed see a marked decline in CMAS achievement across all tested grades and subject areas. Although fewer students tested than in typical years, results can still provide important information on learning in Colorado. The content covered by the tests and the expectations were the same as tests from previous years. Because the scale scores and performance levels retain the same meaning from previous years, results can continue to provide information about what individual students know and can do in relation to the grade-level expectations of the standards.

Participation rates for districts, schools or student groups are lower than in past years. As you know, when participation rates decrease, challenges with interpreting results increase. In addition, the wide availability of different learning settings - in-person, remote learning or hybrid - means that students had varying access to take state tests. As a result, our white students are overrepresented in the results while our black, Hispanic, and multi-racial groups are underrepresented. Our students with IEPs and English learners are also underrepresented. Overall and subgroup participation rates should be closely reviewed when interpreting local aggregated results as the rates will vary greatly across the state this year. Even though the state's participation rates are lower than in past years, the assessment results, when combined with other data, can still help evaluate the impacts of COVID-19 on learning and support effective recovery strategies. Results will be used to inform our ongoing work to support schools and improve educational outcomes for students, and they will provide us with valuable information to help better direct attention and resources to the districts, schools and focus areas in the most need.

As you know, the state accountability system has been paused for a second year, and spring 2021 assessment results will not be used in teacher evaluations or included in performance frameworks.



Your DACs were provided the opportunity to receive the results early, but the results are now publicly posted here:

Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS):

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/assessment/cmas-dataandresults>

Colorado PSAT and SAT:

<https://www.cde.state.co.us/assessment/sat-psat-data>

In addition, we have developed a variety of sample communications materials you can draw from to help communicate with your educators and your families. All of the materials can be found here:

Communications Tools

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/tools-assessments>

Your confidential district and school results were available to you in July, and we are planning to publicly post school- and district-level results later this month.

I know there were a variety of opinions about whether state assessments should have taken place last year. After very robust discussions with you, legislators and the U.S. Department of Education, we arrived on a reasonable plan to move forward with a reduced set of assessments for our students.

Now that we have the results, it is clear that we must quickly develop effective strategies to accelerate student learning. We are here to partner with you and support you with this work that is critical to creating a stronger and more equitable education system for our students.

Sincerely,

Katy



Katy Anthes, Ph.D.
Commissioner

