



STATEWIDE STUDENT ASSESSMENTS

by Lisa Gezelter

Assessments provide teachers, parents, students, policymakers, and other stakeholders in Colorado's education system with a way of measuring student performance against state standards. First administered on a statewide basis in 1997 under the name Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP), statewide assessments are designed to provide measurements of students' academic progress and are used to evaluate the effectiveness of teachers, administrators, schools, and districts.

History of assessments in Colorado. In the 1990s, the General Assembly passed House Bill 93-1313, initiating standards-based education and assessment in Colorado. The bill required the adoption of statewide content standards, and created the CSAP to measure students' progress against those standards.

In 2008, the General Assembly passed Senate Bill 08-212, or Colorado's Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K), which required changes to Colorado's academic content standards, and new assessments aligned with the new standards.

From 2012 until 2014, students in Colorado took the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP) assessments, which provided a transition between CSAP and the new Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) assessments. The CMAS program utilizes English language arts and mathematics assessments developed by the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) consortium. The CMAS science and social studies assessments were developed for Colorado. All four CMAS assessments will be rolled out in 2015.

Federal law. In 2001, Congress passed the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act. Among its many provisions, NCLB requires that states align standardized tests to academic content standards and test students annually in reading and math from grade 3 through grade 8 and once during high school. The law also requires states to test in science once during elementary school, once during middle school, and once during high school.

In September 2011, the U.S. Department of Education invited states to apply for waivers from the requirements of NCLB. Colorado's waiver request was approved on February 9, 2012, and allows the state to evaluate if students graduate from high school ready for careers or college in place of meeting NCLB's 2014 deadline for achieving specific student proficiency rates. The waiver allows the state to use its own accountability system in place of federal requirements.

Assessments in Colorado. Student assessments required by state law are displayed in Table 1.

Results. Since 2008, assessments in reading and math show that student achievement has stayed roughly at the same levels statewide. Figure 1 shows the percentage of students scoring proficient or above in math in 3rd, 5th, 8th, and 10th grades.

Figure 2 shows the percentage of students scoring proficient or above in reading in the same grade levels. From 2008 to 2013, about 70 percent of third graders scored proficient or better on math assessments. However, the proficiency rate for tenth graders stayed below 40 percent.

Table 1
Required Assessments in Colorado, by Grade Level

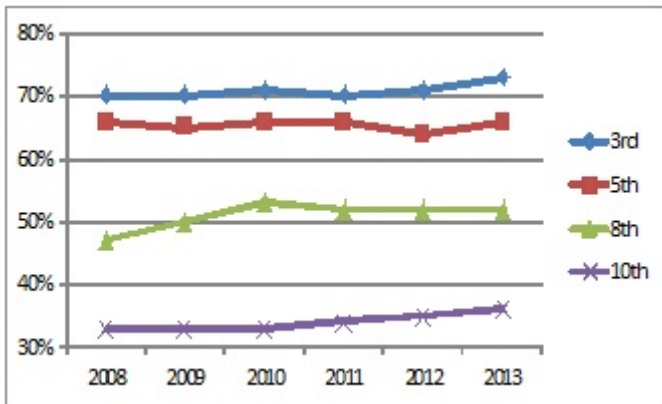
	P	K	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
CMAS - English Language/Arts					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
CMAS - Mathematics					X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	
CMAS - Science*						X				X		X		
CMAS - Social Studies*						X				X		X		
ACCESS for ELLs**		X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Early Literacy		X	X	X										
School Readiness	X	X												
ACT													X	
Spanish Reading/Writing					X	X								
NAEP***						X				X				

* - Science and social studies tests are required once in elementary school, once in middle school, and once in high school. Tested grades are chosen by each school district.

** - English proficiency tests are given to English-language learners during their enrollment in ELL-specific programs and classes, at any time during their public education.

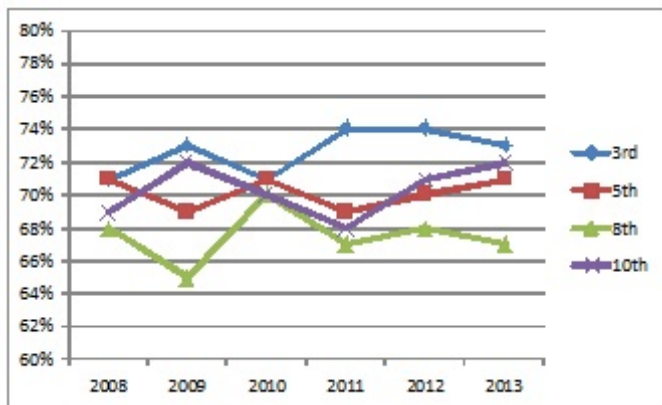
*** - The National Assessment of Education Progress (NAEP) is given only to a sample of 4th and 8th graders.

Figure 1
Math - Percent of Students Proficient or Above, By Grade Level



How data are used. Results of statewide assessments are used by the state to measure the performance of schools, districts, and teachers in educating students to meet state standards. Results are used by teachers and parents to track the progress of individual students, measuring students' progress against state content standards. Under the provisions of Senate Bill 10-191, half of an educator's effectiveness rating will be derived from student academic growth over time as measured by statewide assessments. This requirement was modified by Senate Bill 14-165, which allowed local school districts to decide what percentage of an educator's effectiveness rating would be derived from student academic growth for the 2014-15 school year only.

Figure 2
Reading - Percent of Students Proficient or Above, By Grade Level



Cost of assessments. The General Assembly appropriated nearly \$32 million for FY 2014-15 for assessments required by state law. In addition, the federal government contributed approximately \$7.7 million. School districts bear costs related to the state's assessment program, such as technology upgrades required by the move to online testing, as well as substitute teachers, transportation, and teacher training.