

Messaging the New Tests and Score Reports

Overview

This past spring students across the country took a test aligned to rigorous standards and for the first time provided a more accurate picture of student achievement. Now, parents are about to receive the first round of results from these new tests aligned to higher standards. It is possible that scores could look worse than parents are used to seeing. In health care, you cannot treat an illness without a diagnosis. The same is true in public education. For too long, we have done a disservice to our students. State leaders have an unprecedented opportunity to address inaccurate assumptions parents may have about their child's school experience once these new scores are released. This is the first step on a path of continuous improvement for districts, schools, teachers, and students. To support you in your messaging efforts, we have provided some tested language that we know works with parents and the public.

What is Important to Communicate:

- **We are on the right track.** Change is hard, and most states are moving from old standards that were clearly not preparing our students to achieve their full potential, to standards designed to ensure that a high school diploma represents a student prepared to succeed after high school.
- **The new test is just one measure of a student's knowledge.** It is critical for the public education system to have an honest measure of how it is doing, and this measure only helps students. There is nothing punitive about this test for the student. It does not impact GPA or college entrance.
- **This test replaced the previous state test.** Students did not take an additional test. This test replaced our states test in English language arts and mathematics.
- **The scores will serve as a new baseline for students.** The first year of scores will identify the areas where students need extra support and where they excel so that progress can be measured from this year forward. It is intended to provide information around gap areas to improve instruction.
- **This is a transition year.** This year, with the addition of a writing section and the request that students show their work, our state is taking great pains to get the scoring right. Therefore, students may receive last year's results in the next school year. This is a one-year challenge and we know it is frustrating for parents and teachers, but in subsequent years, the goal is for the scores to be available before summer.
- **This is another tool in a parent's tool kit.** Parents need multiple ways to know how their child is doing. Nothing is more important than an education. This is one additional data set that can help parents know how well their child is doing compared to their peers in their school and in their district as well as to other states. Given that our children will compete for jobs across the United States and the world, the earlier we know where a student needs additional help, the better.
- **This was a test worth taking.** This test measures a wide range of real-world skills that we know students need in the real world, like critical thinking, problem solving, and analysis. The score reports provide teachers and parents with specific areas in each subject where a student is excelling or needs more support to help drive instruction. These results will provide a meaningful assessment of student achievement that parents and teachers can utilize to address challenges and better prepare students for life post-graduation.
- **States are Leading the Way.** Kentucky and Tennessee have demonstrated that persevering through the first years of a new test can lead to improvements in student learning. In its first year

implementing the new standards, Kentucky's statewide proficiency rate dropped drastically, by as much as thirty percentage points in some grades and subjects when compared with the previous state test. Similarly, in Tennessee when students took the revised test for the first time in 2010, scores plummeted. Educators in both states persevered and over the next few years, proficiency rates dramatically increased proving that students can meet high expectations.

What You Can Do

It will be important to provide parents and community leaders with a great deal of contextual information on why these tests are important and how they impact their child. Here are some additional resources and steps to communicate the change to parents:

- Have a proactive communications strategy starting in July and continuing through the timeframe when parents receive their final student scores.
- Work with your department of education to create a comprehensive communications strategy
- Partner with local school districts to support their efforts during this transition.
- Partner with your state PTA to ensure that parents are receiving information about the tests and the change in scores.

Resources you can Use:

- **National PTA:** Contains resources for parents on standards and assessments. www.pta.org/commoncore
- **Business For Core:** Contains helpful resources for business leaders to message the standards. www.businessforcore.org
- **Be a Learning Hero:** Contains helpful sources for parents to support their learning about the changes in the classroom, provides tips to help their child in ELA and math at home, as well as links to great resources. www.bealearninghero.org
- **Honesty Gap:** Contains helpful information about how your states performance on NAEP and your state test. The information can be used to make the case for higher standards and aligned rigorous assessments. www.honestygap.org