



PARENTS' GUIDE TO ASSESSMENTS IN MAINE

Maine's state assessments, known as the Maine Educational Assessments (MEA), measure the progress of Maine's students toward meeting the state's College and Career Readiness (CCR) standards in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics that were adopted in 2011.

Beginning in spring 2015, new assessments were issued to better gauge how well students are mastering the CCR standards—and ultimately how ready they are for the next grade and for college and careers after graduation. In 2015, Maine became part of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, which allowed the state to share an assessment of CCR standards with a group of other states. However, in spring 2016, Maine's students will take different assessments that still measure Maine's CCR standards, but require a shorter amount of testing time.

Starting in spring 2016, Maine students in grades 3-8 will take part in a new online assessment system called "eMPower™ME". This new online assessment reduces the 7-8 hours of testing time required in 2015 to about 1-2 hours. At the high school level, students participated in the SAT, an assessment which provides increased relevance for students and their parents, and reduces testing time to about 4 hours.

WHY NEW ASSESSMENTS?

Teachers and principals talk a lot about assessments, which are used to measure students' academic achievement. This document highlights the end-of-year summative assessments, which judge (1) student progress toward mastering state standards and (2) program and school effectiveness. For other assessments used, see box at right.

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

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.

THIS GUIDE CONTAINS:

- Overview of new assessments, which measure student proficiency against more rigorous standards
- Overview of accountability for students, teachers and schools
- Additional resources for parents



What is different about the new assessments?

The new assessments for ELA/literacy and mathematics will enable educators to deepen their understanding of student progress from grade to grade—and just as importantly, identify any gaps in progress so they can address them **well before students enter college or the workforce.**

ELA/literacy assessments will demonstrate:

- Whether students can read and comprehend texts of varying complexities.
- How well students can integrate information across sources to make a persuasive argument.
- The degree to which students can use context to determine the meaning of academic vocabulary.

Mathematics assessments will demonstrate:

- Whether students understand and can use important mathematics ideas, including number sense, algebraic thinking, geometry and data analysis.
- The extent to which students can use mathematics facts and reasoning skills to solve real-world problems.
- How well students can make mathematics arguments.

Benefits of new assessments:



- The assessments allow students to show their work and explain their reasoning so teachers can better understand what they know and where there are gaps in learning that need to be addressed.
- Rather than focusing on what a child has memorized through multiple choice questions, the new tests ask students to apply skills like thinking, reasoning and justifying answers—showing what they know and can do.
- The tests do not lend themselves to “teaching to the test.” Since they focus on applying skills, it is the daily practice of these skills in the classroom that will serve as the best preparation for the tests.
- Computer-based assessments are more efficient, innovative and engaging.
- The new assessments will be designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students.

College and career readiness defined:

The level of preparation a student needs to enroll and succeed—without remediation—in a credit-bearing course at a postsecondary institution that offers a baccalaureate degree or in a high-quality certificate program that enables students to enter a career pathway with potential future advancement.

What Parents Can Expect

Assessments such as eMPower™ME and SAT are designed to measure the new, more rigorous expectations of the CCR standards Maine adopted in 2011. Because the tests measure complex skills, which are different from the skills measured by previous state tests, scores on these assessments may look lower. But students aren't doing worse—it's just that the bar is higher.

As students and teachers gain the skills and knowledge needed to meet the new higher standards, performance will also improve. In other states where more rigorous tests have been implemented, students improved their performance after the first year.

How will schools support students during the transition?

Schools have created a variety of models to assist students who may need extra help achieving the new standards. Remediation and summer courses, in-class adjustments based on ongoing in-class assessment results, and pull-out tutoring are just a few support strategies. Parents should collaborate with teachers and administrators to develop a plan as needed.

How are school districts and schools held accountable?

In December 2015, the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act was reauthorized. Formerly known as the No Child Left Behind Act, it was adjusted, reauthorized and renamed the Every Student Succeeds Act. In preparation for implementing the new law, the Maine Department of Education will develop a new accountability system to ensure that schools are effectively helping students to successfully achieve Maine's new CCR standards. The Maine Department of Education will work with several groups, including parents, to develop a meaningful accountability system for implementation in the 2017-18 school year.

How are students held accountable ?

Even if a student does not meet proficiency levels, there will be no negative consequences such as holding the student back a year. Instead, parents can work with the school to develop an improvement plan tailored to the specific student's needs.





Take Action

Parents are their child's best advocates. As a parent and your child's first teacher, you should be informed of the assessment and accountability system that is in place in your child's school. Parents and families must be at the table with school leaders and school districts to ensure that testing is implemented well and with enough resources to ensure success.

The Maine Department of Education should include parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration and respect. For additional details about the state's assessment and accountability system, please call the Maine Department of Education at (207) 624-6600. Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- How many assessments does my child take this school year and where can I access/view the assessment calendar?
- What will happen if my child does not meet proficiency levels on the new assessments?
- How will the results of tests be used to support my child's learning?
- What can I do, as a parent, to help my child do his or her best?
- How will school evaluations be affected by results of the new assessments?

Also, be sure to speak with your local school administrators! Ask them to host a parent night in the spring to explain the tests, and in the fall to explain test results.

Below is the list of policies and practices that National PTA supports. Check with the Maine Department of Education to determine if Maine's policies and practices are closely aligned with those of the PTA.

- National PTA believes that valid assessment does not consist of only a single test score, and that at no time should a single test be considered the sole determinant of a student's academic or work future.
- National PTA supports nationally agreed upon voluntary standards if they are derived by consensus at the state and local levels. Parents must be involved in this process.
- National PTA believes that assessments provide valuable information to parents, teachers and school leaders about the growth and achievement of their students. Furthermore, having annual data on the performance of students can help inform teaching and learning as well as identify achievement gaps among groups of students within a school and among school districts. National PTA believes assessments are essential to ensure that all students receive a high-quality education.

Preparing and Supporting Your Child

- Review the testing calendar and work with your child's school to ensure there will be regular and clear communications from the school on the assessments, the results and how they are used.
- Discuss the new tests with your child. Make sure he or she feels comfortable and understands the reasons for taking a test.
- With an older child, explain that the new assessments were created to make sure he or she stays on track to succeed after graduation and to identify any issues early enough so you can give any needed support.
- Explain to your child that the tests will initially be more challenging. Tell your child you have high expectations and you



and the teachers are there to help every step of the way.

- Review test results with your child and his or her teacher.
- Make sure your child has a comfortable place for studying and is prepared mentally and physically for a test.

Staying informed and involved

- Become familiar with Maine College and Career Readiness Standards, visit: maine.gov/doe/proficiency/standards/maine-learning-results.html
- Learn more about the new assessments that will be given to Maine students in spring 2016, visit: mainedoews.net/2015/12/03/maine-signs-assessment-contract-with-valued-proven-partner
- Read all comments written by the teacher on classroom lessons and tests. Ask teachers to explain anything that is unclear and discuss how you can best work together to address areas of improvement for your child.
- Monitor your child's progress and regularly communicate with your child's teachers. 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.
- Remember that 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 progress. Ask for activities to do at home to help prepare for tests and improve your child's proficiency.

Additional resources

- Visit the Maine Department of Education website: maine.gov/doe/assessment/index.html