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PARENTS' GUIDE TO NEW ASSESSMENTS IN SOUTH CAROLINA

Starting in spring 2016, South Carolina students in grades 3-8 will be taking the South Carolina College and Career READY Assessments (SC READY) in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. These new assessments gauge how well students are mastering the standards—and ultimately how ready they are for the next grade, and for college and careers after graduation.

South Carolina laws established in 2014 require a college and career readiness assessment for 11th grade students beginning in 2014-2015. Although such tests were given in 2015 (The ACT and the ACT WorkKeys), new assessments are being evaluated for 2016 and beyond. The South Carolina Department of Education will keep parents informed about any new developments.

State assessments, including SC READY, are aligned with the 2015 South Carolina College and Career Ready Standards for ELA and mathematics, which were adopted in spring 2015.

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 INCLUDES:

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

What is different about the new summative assessments?

The new assessments for English 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.**

Reading 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.

Math assessments will demonstrate:

- Whether students understand and can use important math ideas, including number sense, algebraic thinking, geometry and data analysis.
- The extent to which students can use math facts and reasoning skills to solve real-world problems.
- How well students can make math 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.
- Starting in the 2016-17 school year, most parts of SC Ready will be required to be given online. Starting in 2017, all assessments will be required to be online. Computer-based assessments are more efficient, innovative and engaging, and they enable insight into student progress at multiple points.
- The new assessments will be designed to provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners.

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.

Sample Questions by Grade Level

The following questions are representative of those found on the new assessments.

EXAMPLE OF A 4TH-GRADE MATH QUESTION

Three classes at Lakeview School are going on a field trip. The table shows the number of people in each class, including the teacher.

They can choose to use buses, vans, and cars.



Buses have 20 seats



Vans have 16 seats



Cars have 5 seats

	Total number of people
Mrs. Ruiz's Class	23
Mr. Yang's Class	25
Mrs. Evans' Class	24

Which three combinations can be used to take all three classes on a field trip?

- 1 bus and 4 vans
- 1 bus and 8 cars
- 3 vans and 11 cars
- 2 buses and 3 vans and 4 cars
- 1 bus and 1 van and 6 cars

Submit Answer

EXAMPLE OF A 6TH-GRADE ELA QUESTION

Students are asked to read a passage from the fictional text, "Julie of the Wolves," by Jean C. George, and answer the following:

SAMPLE ITEM

In the passage, the author developed a strong character named Miyax. Think about Miyax and the details the author used to create the character. The passage ends with Miyax waiting for the black wolf to look at her.

Write an original story to continue where the passage ended. In your story, be sure to use what you have learned about the character Miyax as you tell what happens to her next.

Answer:

EXAMPLE OF A 10TH-GRADE ELA QUESTION

SAMPLE ITEM

Use what you have learned from reading "Daedalus and Icarus" by Ovid and "To a Friend Whose Work Has Come to Triumph" by Anne Sexton to write an essay that provides an analysis of how Sexton transforms Daedalus and Icarus.

As a starting point, you may want to consider what is emphasized, absent, or different in the two texts, but feel free to develop your own focus for analysis.

Develop your essay by providing textual evidence from both texts. Be sure to follow the conventions of standard English.

Answer:

What Parents Can Expect

New assessments in South Carolina are designed to measure the new, more rigorous expectations of the state standards. Because the tests measure complex skills, which are different from the skills measured by previous state tests, scores on new assessments will 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.

In South Carolina, teachers have been instructed to teach the state standards, not to any one test, which should help students do as well as possible, no matter which tests they are given.

For a chart of online testing tools and support for students taking the tests, visit: ed.sc.gov/scdoe/assets/File/districts-schools/special-ed-services/SC%20Ready%20Accommodations%20Charts_12-31-15.pdf.

How will schools support students during the transition?

Schools have created a variety of models to assist students who are struggling with the 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.

TAKE ACTION: Parents can work with school or district curriculum directors to learn about the new curriculum, and understand how to support their children to minimize any dips in assessment scores.

How are schools, students, and teachers held accountable?

In light of the new assessments, South Carolina is working to revise its accountability plan.

The plan, along with new school accountability procedures, will also specify the ways students who do not meet proficiency levels will be held accountable.

In the immediate future, even if a student does not meet proficiency levels, there should be no negative consequences such as holding him or her back a year. Instead, parents can work with the school to develop an improvement plan tailored to the specific student's needs.

Starting in 2015, a new "Educator Support and Evaluation System" was put into place to give each teacher an effectiveness rating. The system includes three components:

- Professional practice makes up 50% of the rating and looks at a teacher's performance in the classroom.
- Student academic growth accounts for at least 30% of the rating. It can be based on students' test performance on state-wide assessments, or on "Student Learning Objectives" in non-tested grades and subjects.
- District choice makes up 20% of the rating and gives school districts flexibility to evaluate a teacher on a measure of their choice. This could include student or parent surveys or other measures.

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.

South Carolina should include parents and teachers in thoughtful conversations based on trust, collaboration and respect. For additional details about the assessment and accountability system, please call (803) 734-8500 or send an email to info@ed.sc.gov

Here are some questions you might want to ask:

- How many assessments will 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 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 based on 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 South Carolina Department of Education to determine if their 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 children. Make sure they feel comfortable and understand why they are taking a test.
- Make sure your child has a comfortable place for studying, and is prepared mentally and physically for a test.
- With older children, explain that the new assessments were created to make sure they are on track to succeed after graduation, and to identify any issues early enough to give them more support.
- Explain to your child that the tests will initially be more challenging. Tell your child you have high expectations and that you and the teachers are there to help every step of the way.
- Review test results with your child and his or her teacher.

Staying informed and involved

- Visit: ed.sc.gov/instruction/standards-learning to become familiar with South Carolina’s College and Career Ready Standards.
- Watch for updates and more information on assessments aligned to these standards, visit: ed.sc.gov/tests/assessment-information.
- 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.
- 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 his or her progress. Ask for activities to do at home to help prepare for tests and improve your child’s proficiency.

Additional Resources

- Visit the South Carolina Department of Education website: ed.sc.gov