

Moving Beyond the Bubble: Improved Tests are Finally Here!

WE ARE MOVING AWAY FROM FILL-IN-THE-BUBBLE TESTS! HOW ARE ASSESSMENTS CHANGING?

For years, most year-end tests were mainly multiple-choice exams that focused on basic skills. These tests did a poor job of measuring the skills students need for success after high school—like writing, critical thinking, and problem solving. With new education standards, states are working together to develop quality tests. In 2014-15, schools will replace their old tests with new assessments built to let parents and teachers know how well students are learning the skills and knowledge they need to succeed in today's world.

WHAT ARE THE NEW TESTS TRYING TO ACCOMPLISH?

MEASURE REAL-WORLD SKILLS. To be ready for college and the workplace, students need to apply their knowledge and skills through critical thinking, analytical writing, and problem solving. The new assessments measure the skills students need to know when they graduate.

END TEACHING TO THE TEST. The new assessments include activities that more closely mirror what students are learning in class. They provide a more accurate understanding of student knowledge than previous tests because they ask students to show and apply what they know, instead of just picking the right answer from a multiple-choice question.

IDENTIFY WHETHER STUDENTS ARE ON THE PATH TO SUCCESS. Parents should be able to know whether their children have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. The new assessments provide an academic check-up and help teachers and parents know whether students are on track to be college- and career-ready at each grade level.

USE TECHNOLOGY TO PROVIDE BETTER INFORMATION FOR TEACHERS AND PARENTS. Online tests are faster to score, giving teachers and parents more timely information about student performance. They also include a greater variety of questions and are more secure than paper tests.

PROVIDE OPPORTUNITIES FOR EARLY INTERVENTION. Teachers have access to interim assessments that can be administered during the year to check on student progress. When teachers have information about students' strengths and weaknesses, they can better support their learning.

REPLACE STATE TESTS IN ENGLISH AND MATH. Created by experts and educators, the new assessments will replace existing state tests in English and math.

SUPPORT STUDENTS WITH SPECIAL NEEDS. New assessments include a wealth of resources to help all students demonstrate what they know and can do.

WHAT QUALITY ASSESSMENTS SHOULD DO:

Tell what students have learned - A big part of a teacher's job is to plan relevant and challenging instruction for students. Teachers can use information from assessments to design lessons that meet the needs of their students.

Identify where students need help - Parents want to know how their kids are progressing in school. Assessments can provide an objective look at how students are performing in the classroom, showing parents where they perform well or areas where they may need additional help.

Inform transitions - Assessments are helpful for transitions. They can help teachers understand the needs of students who are new to their class or school. Tests are also sometimes used—along with other information—to help decide if students should be placed in special programs.

Provide information about the performance of schools and districts - Assessment results help measure the progress that schools and districts are making in educating all students. This information helps administrators find out which students are succeeding and which ones need additional help.

WHAT SHOULD I LOOK FOR IN MY CHILD'S TESTS?

There may be several assessments used by your child's school, including interim or benchmark assessments administered throughout the year, as well as a year-end assessment. These tests allow teachers to check on student progress.

TO BE WORTHWHILE, ALL TESTS SHOULD:

BE HIGH-QUALITY. Assessments should measure students' ability to think critically, synthesize material from multiple sources, and analyze problems. High-quality tests are aligned to standards that prepare students for success beyond high school.

MEASURE WHAT MATTERS. Tests should cover what students learn in class and help predict their performance at the end of the year.

PROVIDE MEANINGFUL RESULTS THAT INFORM INSTRUCTION. Results from assessments should identify students' strengths and weaknesses, allowing teachers to improve instruction. Tests should provide results that are timely and easily understandable by parents, teachers and students.

GO BEYOND MULTIPLE-CHOICE. Tests should include a variety of questions—not just multiple-choice. Writing prompts and math questions that require students to formulate equations or explain their reasoning demonstrate that students truly understand the content.

WHAT SHOULD I ASK ABOUT ASSESSMENTS?

ASK YOUR CHILD:

Did the test cover material that you learned in class? Were there questions other than fill in the bubble?

ASK YOUR CHILD'S TEACHER:

How are you using the results of these tests? What can I do to help my child do his or her best?

ASK YOUR SCHOOL AND DISTRICT LEADERS:

How many assessments does my child take this year? How do the tests help students, teachers, and schools get the support they need to improve?

¹ The Center for American Progress, <http://www.americanprogress.org/issues/education/report/2014/10/16/99073/testing-overload-in-americas-schools/>

² <http://applications.education.ky.gov/SRC/>

TYPES OF ASSESSMENTS

Formative: Activities teachers engage in throughout the year—such as classroom discussion, observation of student work, and assignments and quizzes—to assess knowledge and skills in specific areas and adjust instruction.

Interim: Tests given during the school year to measure student performance against a particular set of standards.

Summative: End-of-year assessments administered by the state to measure student performance against a common set of standards.

HOW MUCH TIME DO STUDENTS SPEND TAKING TESTS?

Although the amount of testing time varies by state and school district, two studies found that students spend less than 2% of instructional time taking assessments.¹

RESULTS TAKE TIME

College and career readiness standards and assessments will improve student achievement over time as teachers and students get used to the new standards and tests. Reports of fewer students meeting grade-level expectations don't necessarily mean that schools are performing worse or that students are learning less. Rather, new assessments set a higher bar and provide a more accurate measure of how students are doing in English and math. Results should improve as students have more years of instruction based on the new standards. In Kentucky, the first state to adopt college and career readiness standards, the percentage of high school graduates ready for college and careers has increased from 34% to 62% in four years.²