



KEY POINTS >

FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

OVERVIEW

- Delaware students deserve the very best education. Their ability to succeed in a competitive world depends on it.
- That's why Delaware has been a leader in raising the state's academic standards to help all students graduate from high school ready for college and careers, with the 21st century skills employers are seeking.
- These new, higher expectations, known as the Common Core State Standards, have necessitated the development of a new, aligned testing system to determine how well students are mastering the new standards and where they need help in preparing for future success in college and careers.
- As of spring 2015, the Smarter Assessment system replaces the Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System (DCAS) with Smarter English Language Arts/Literacy and Smarter Mathematics Assessments for grades 3 to 8 and 11.
- The results will help schools, teachers and parents work better together and help Delaware students get *Ready for the Real World*.

SMARTER ASSESSMENT

- The new Smarter Assessment is more than year-end testing. It is a complete system that delivers the high-quality data, tools and resources schools need to support improvements in student learning throughout the year. Features include a *Digital Library* of online resources for teachers and optional *Interim Assessments* they can use to track student progress.
- The assessments were field tested by a sample of students in March 2014 to ensure that they are accurate and fair for all students.
- Smarter Assessment offers significant improvements over previous testing. It replaces the traditional multiple choice format with open-ended questions that require students to write short answers, explain their thinking and solve problems in very different ways.
- For English Language Arts (ELA), students are asked to read more complex fiction and non-fiction texts across all subjects, not just English. They will use evidence from the texts to answer questions, make inferences and write essays.
- In mathematics, students will be performing more multi-step problems with application to real-world situations, and will have to explain how they achieved their answers.
- Unlike previous testing, which was given as often as three times each year, the new assessments will be given just once each spring, with 2015 testing conducted between March 10 and June 4 for grades 3 to 8 and April 13 through June 4 for grade 11.
- The portions of the tests that call for written responses will be hand-scored individually by people who have expertise in the subject matter and are trained to judge them objectively. That

takes longer, so parents will not receive their children’s results until July. Statewide scores will be released in August.

- Because students are being assessed by more challenging academic standards than before, fewer will likely meet the new standards initially. The first year of testing will establish a new baseline, and results should improve as students receive more years of instruction aligned with the standards.
- To allow all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners, to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, the new assessment system offers the most complete suite of accessibility tools and accommodation resources ever included in a K–12 assessment, such as Braille and closed captioning.

CONCERNS ABOUT OVER-TESTING AND PARENT REFUSALS

- Governor Jack Markell recently announced that the state would provide each school district and charter school with the resources they need to “audit” their current testing practices to identify any tests that can be eliminated. The Delaware Department of Education has already eliminated some previously required end-of-course exams and is continuing to evaluate all statewide tests to determine if some can be eliminated.
- Families are encouraged to have their children participate because the assessments provide reliable, meaningful, objective measures of whether students are mastering the new standards. The assessments also will serve to show the strengths and weaknesses of instruction in a school. The strengths will be celebrated, and the weaknesses will show where teachers and principals should provide additional resources.
- The time devoted to the Smarter English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics Assessments amounts to less than 1 percent of the time students are in school.
- A small percentage of parents have said they will refuse to have their students tested.
- Delaware law requires that schools assess all students, with the exception of those excused for medical or mental health reasons.
- Schools cannot legally exempt students from taking the tests. There is no official “opt out” process because schools and districts do not have the power to grant that request.
- In addition, Delaware has agreed to administer annual tests in English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, which is a condition of receiving \$44 million through the federal Title 1 program for programs and support such as additional teachers, specialists and classroom aides, professional development for educators and assistive technology.
- At the state, district and school levels, if less than 95% of students of any one group, such as low-income students, do not take the tests, the federal government may withhold federal aid that schools use to provide a wide range of services.

COMMON CORE STATE STANDARDS

- Voluntarily adopted by more than 40 states, the Common Core State Standards challenge students to understand subject matter more deeply, to think critically and to apply that learning to the real world.
- While the standards represent a national set of academic expectations consistent from state to state and on-par with international benchmarks, curriculum and instructional strategy remain a local decision of teachers and schools.