



201 East Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203-1799

March 4, 2015

Dear Parents and Guardians,

Thank you for contacting the Colorado Department of Education with your questions about the state tests.

Parents want to know if their children are gaining the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in today's complex world. Colorado's new tests, called the Colorado Measures of Academic Success, will provide an academic checkup and help teachers, students and parents understand if students are on track to be ready for college or a career when they graduate from high school. CMAS includes tests in science and social studies as well as PARCC-developed tests in English and math.

You can find a great deal of information about CMAS on the CDE website at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/factsheetsandfaq-assessment>. This page includes fact sheets on a variety of issues and answers to questions parents frequently ask.

Parents also have the right to refuse to allow their child to participate in the state tests. In February 2015 the State Board of Education adopted a motion to not hold districts accountable for the decisions of parents who do not allow their children to take the PARCC-developed tests in English language arts and math. Effective immediately, districts will not be penalized by a lowering of their accreditation rating should their student participation rate fall below 95 percent due to parent refusals. CDE has asked districts to document parent refusals and make good faith efforts to have students participate in the tests. You can find more information about opting out of the CMAS tests at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/communications/parccoptout>.

Conversations are taking place around the nation as people consider the right balance of instruction and getting feedback to know if students have learned what teachers intended. That feedback is typically gained through tests given on behalf of teachers, schools, districts or the state. While the CMAS tests are required by federal and state laws, the Colorado General Assembly is considering several bills that could change the requirements around our current tests. In Colorado, the issue of assessments was specifically taken up by The Assessment Task Force which was appointed by the legislature last year. That group recently released a report with its recommendations for changes in legislation. You can find that report at <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdedepcom/finalreport1202taskforce>.

The discussion around testing is an important one. All parents are encouraged to participate in it with thoughtful consideration of how Colorado can make the best decisions for our students' future.

Sincerely,

Robert K. Hammond
Commissioner of Education

