



CALIFORNIA DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

NEWS RELEASE

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State Schools Chief Tom Torlakson Applauds Testing Overhaul
Outdated assessments set aside to measure readiness for college and careers

SACRAMENTO—State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson congratulated Governor Jerry Brown and the State Legislature for their work to sweep away outdated tests in favor of modern, computer-based assessments that will measure student readiness for the challenges of college and the workplace.

“Faced with the choice of preparing California’s children for the future or continuing to cling to outdated policies of the past, our state’s leaders worked together and made the right choice for our students,” Torlakson said. “These new assessments represent a challenge for our education system—but a lifetime of opportunity for students. As a teacher, I’m thrilled to see our state and our schools once again leading the way.”

Torlakson hailed the Governor’s signing today of Assembly Bill 484, the State Superintendent’s sponsored legislation to remake the state’s student assessment system to reflect the Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

The legislation, authored by Assemblywoman Susan A. Bonilla (D-Concord), was based on Torlakson’s recommendations for modernizing the student testing system, which were published in a comprehensive report issued in January.

The new law suspends most Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) assessments for the current school year, allowing school districts to prepare for and transition to the new California Measurement of Academic Performance and Progress assessments, which are slated for administration statewide in the 2014-15 school year.

The new assessments will be computer-based, allowing for a much broader range of test questions than the multiple-choice exams given under STAR. As a result, the new assessments are expected to emphasize critical thinking, reasoning, and problem-solving, modeling the kind of teaching and learning needed to prepare all students for the demands of college and the modern workplace.

Part of the assessment system, developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter), also will be computer adaptive, so that a student’s prior responses affect the difficulty of subsequent questions, allowing a far more precise measurement of student skills and knowledge than the former tests.

For the current school year, AB 484 requires districts to administer field tests of the Smarter Balanced assessments—with half of the students taking math and the other half taking English-language arts. Field tests serve as “tests of the tests” allowing experts to discern the accuracy and reliability of individual test questions before finalizing the assessments for full-scale use. As such, no field test scores will be produced or reported during the field test year.

California is one of 45 states, the District of Columbia, and three territories that formally have adopted the CCSS for mathematics and English–language arts. The proposed revisions to align the state’s assessment system with the new standards adopted by the State Board of Education in 2010 mark a key milestone in implementing the CCSS.

California serves as a governing state in Smarter, a multistate–led group that has been working collaboratively to develop a student assessment system aligned with the CCSS.

The Smarter Balanced assessments were designed to meet federal- and state-level accountability requirements and provide teachers and parents with timely and accurate information to measure student performance and progress.

“I’ve said from the beginning, California needs tests that measure how ready our students are for the challenges of a changing world,” Torlakson said. “Today, we have taken a huge step in that direction by creating an assessment system focused on improving teaching and learning and by sending a clear signal about our commitment to this urgent work.”

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