

April 2015

Dear Parent/Guardian:

As parents and educators, I know that we do not believe a single test score gives a real picture or tells us everything we need to know about how our students are doing. Please know we believe our students are so much more than a once-a-year test score. Our Board of Education recently passed a resolution to this effect. (See <http://www.boarddocs.com/ca/sandi/Board.nsf/Public>). Even knowing this, however, we currently live in a system that requires us to report annually on student achievement.

As you may know, California is in the process of transitioning the state student assessment system. Since 2001, our state assessment system was known as the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program, which included the California Standards Tests (CSTs) among other measures. The new assessment system is now known as California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP), and includes the Smarter Balanced assessment in place of the CST as we transition to the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS). These bold new standards change the way we are teaching students. With or without new standards, the world has changed and the business sector has clearly articulated the need for students who know how to reason and think critically.

Although this assessment is required, it is not something we necessarily believe is the most meaningful way to understand your child's progress. Standardized assessments are but one measure of knowing how your child is doing. We are committed to using *multiple* measures of success beyond standardized achievements tests. We also have classroom-, school-based and district-wide assessments; some are weekly, some are monthly. We believe the most meaningful measure is based on what we see in the classroom on a day-to-day basis. I would encourage you to talk with your child's teacher to learn more about your student's progress. Our goal is to ensure that every student becomes an actively literate contributing member of society. The Common Core State Standards and the variety of assessments we have in place will help us do that.

WHEN WILL MY STUDENT TAKE THE NEW ASSESSMENT?

Last year, we did a pilot of this new Smarter Balanced assessment. All students in grades 3 – 8 and 11 had the opportunity to take the pilot test. The formal assessment will be administered this spring. In San Diego Unified, the testing window opens in April for traditional sites, and in May for year-round sites through the end of the school year. Individual schools determine their site testing schedules and you will receive that information directly from your child's school. Your child's individual score reports will be mailed to you during the summer. The report will include an overall score and a description of your child's achievement level on that test. Please know that the scores you will receive for this assessment are not a complete or necessarily accurate measurement of your student's overall performance, progress, or success in school. These scores are a single measurement from a single point in time.

Please note that the scores for the Smarter Balanced assessments **should not be compared to scores that your child previously received** on the CST. The Smarter Balanced assessments involve very different types of test questions and a different approach to scoring.

The names of the various required state assessments may read like a testing alphabet soup and sound a little like educational jargon, so I want to clarify the names of each assessment, and their purpose.

For the 2014–15 school year, CAASPP is comprised of the following:

- **Smarter Balanced assessments for English language arts and mathematics in grades three through eight, and grade eleven.** The Smarter Balanced assessments are delivered by computer and consist of two sections: a computer-adaptive test and a performance task based on the Common Core State Standards for English language arts and mathematics. Based on student responses, the computer program adjusts the difficulty of questions throughout the assessment. For example, a student who answers a question correctly will receive a more challenging item, while an incorrect answer generates an easier question. By adapting to the student as the assessment is taking place, these assessments present an individually tailored set of questions to each student and can quickly identify which skills students have mastered.

I want to assure you that we are ahead of schedule in being ready. Through our i-21 technology initiative, we have had the necessary technology in place well in advance of the practice tests last year.

- **Grade-level science assessments, including the California Standards Tests (CSTs), California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA), and the California Modified Assessment (CMA), in grades five, eight, and ten.** The CSTs, CMA, and CAPA are all paper and pencil tests based on the California content standards for science adopted by the State Board of California in October 1998. (Science assessments based on the *Next Generation Science Standards*, adopted in September 2013, are not yet available).
- **California Alternate Assessment (CAA) for English–language arts and mathematics in grades three through eight, and grade eleven.** The content of the alternate assessment will be based on alternate achievement standards derived from the Common Core State Standards for students with the most significant cognitive disabilities. The alternate assessments are anticipated to be delivered on the computer, with a field test preceding the operational administration.

If you would like more information about the CAASPP, please visit the Parent/Student tab of the California Department of Education (CDE) CAASPP Web page at www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/. If you do not want your child to participate in the CAASPP testing, you must complete a *Parent/Guardian Request to Exempt Student* form available from your child's school.

We know that test-taking can sometimes cause anxiety. We have some great tips for parents on things that can be done at home to help with test-taking – as well as tips for students at all grade levels. You can learn more at www.sandi.net/testing. Your support is essential to your child's success.

Sincerely,



Cindy Marten
Superintendent of Public Education