

# **COLORADO K-12 STUDENT ASSESSMENTS:**

## **Standards and Reform in Colorado Public Schools**

*This pamphlet describes the Colorado Student Assessment Program and its role in standards-based reform in Colorado public schools.*

The Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) is a standards-based assessment program that measures all Colorado public school students in grades three through ten. Additionally, a college entrance examination is given to all eleventh-grade students. The assessments given in all grades contribute to a system of accountability and reform that includes school report cards and letter grades for each public school in the state.

*Colorado Legislative Council Staff  
November 2000*

### **THE COLORADO STUDENT ASSESSMENT PROGRAM**

In the last decade, educational accountability in Colorado public schools has progressed through the establishment of model content standards, the development of statewide assessments, and, most recently, the institution of school report cards and school improvement plans. Beginning in 1997, statewide assessments in fourth grade reading and writing were ushered in through the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP), with the program expanding to include more grade levels and subject matter in subsequent years. This publication summarizes various aspects of the CSAP program within the context of its increasing role in Colorado's movement toward standards-based education reform.

***CSAP and model content standards.*** The framework for Colorado student assessments aligns with state model content standards. Model content standards designate what students should know at certain points in their schooling and as they progress toward high school graduation. House Bill 93-1313 required the establishment of state model content standards, as well as the development of standards in each local school district. Districts may adopt state model content standards or formulate standards specific to the district, as long as the district standards are at least as rigorous as state standards.

The State Board of Education has adopted model content standards in the following areas: civics, dance, economics, foreign language, geography, history, mathematics, music, physical education, science, reading and writing, theater, and visual arts. State Suggested Grade Level Expectations further define what is expected of students. While model content standards represent general expectations for certain grade ranges, such as K-4, grade level expectations set more specific guidelines for what students should know at each grade level.

***A standards-based system.*** Assessments are designed to provide information not only on student performance, but also on the effectiveness of teachers, schools, and districts in delivering educational services. Standards-based assessments measure student performance in relation to subject area and grade-specific performance expectations, in contrast to norm-based assessments, which measure performance in relation to the performance of other students on the assessment.

**Who takes student assessments?** Under CSAP, all Colorado public school students will be tested in grades three through ten. Eleventh grade students are required to take a college entrance exam; however, the eleventh grade assessment, the ACT Assessment, is not a component of CSAP.

### Assessment Schedule

<i>Grade</i>	<i>Spring 2001</i>	<i>Spring 2002</i>
3	reading	reading and writing
4	reading and writing	reading and writing
5	reading and math	reading, math, and writing
6	reading	reading, math, and writing
7	reading and writing	reading, math, and writing
8	reading, math, and science	reading, math, writing, and science
9	reading	reading, math, and writing
10	reading, math, and writing	reading, math, and writing
11	college entrance exam	college entrance exam

**Timeline for CSAP testing and reporting.** School districts administer CSAP assessments during February and March of each year. Statewide reporting of results occurs during May and June.

**What is the format of the assessments?** CSAP assessments consist of both written and multiple choice responses. Written, or constructed response sections, comprise 25 percent of the CSAP exam, with multiple choice questions making up the remaining sections.

**How are assessments scored?** Assessments for each subject level and grade level are scored according to performance levels. "Cut points," or performance ranges, establish what students in each performance level should know and be able to do. The four CSAP performance levels are: advanced, proficient, partially proficient, and unsatisfactory.

**Alternative tests and accommodations.** Specific categories of students may be eligible either for alternative assessments or for testing accommodations. Third and fourth-grade students whose dominant language is not English may be eligible for assessments in a language other than English.

An alternative assessment, CSAP-A, may be offered to a small group of 4<sup>th</sup> grade students who are under Individual Education Programs (IEPs) and who are working on different instructional levels than those measured by the general CSAP. The CSAP-A measures progress in reading and writing for students whose literacy skills are still emerging.

CSAP accommodations are a general set of guidelines that may be followed to facilitate the assessment of students with unique learning needs. Examples of students who may be eligible for accommodations are special education students or visually impaired students who have received instructional accommodations for at least three months prior to the assessment.

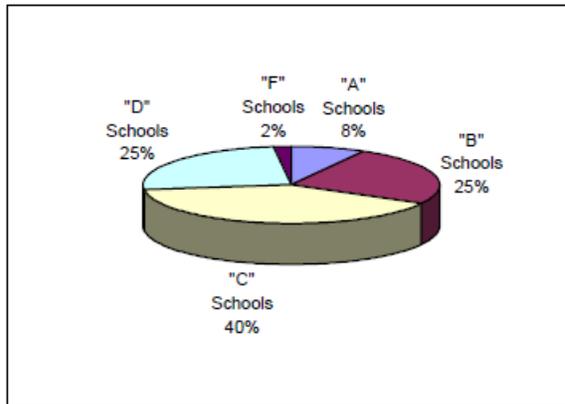
**The CSAP and school report cards.** Senate Bill 00-186 established the 2000-01 school year as a baseline year for student performance and implements a system of school report cards and letter grades based on CSAP scores. The school report card will assign each public school a letter grade, "A" through "F," on overall academic performance.

A school's overall academic performance grade will be determined based on student performance on CSAP assessments and college entrance examinations. The grades will be distributed based on a school's weighted total scores, as follows:

- Schools in the highest eight percent of scores in the state will receive an "A";
- Schools below the highest eight percent and above the lowest 67 percent of scores in the state will receive a "B";
- Schools below the highest 33 percent and above the lowest 27 percent of scores in the state will receive a "C";
- Schools below the highest 73 percent and above the lowest two percent of scores in the state will receive a "D"; and
- Schools in the lowest two percent of scores in the state will receive an "F."

### Distribution of School Letter Grades

"A" Schools	8%
"B" Schools	25%
"C" Schools	40%
"D" Schools	25%
"F" Schools	2%



After the baseline year of 2000-01, each public school will also receive a letter grade or designation for academic improvement. Schools that received a "C," "D," or "F" for overall academic performance in the preceding school year will receive a letter grade "A" through "F" for improvement in academic performance. Schools that received an "A" or "B" for overall academic performance in the preceding school year will receive a designation of "significant improvement in school performance," "decline in school performance," or "significant decline in school performance."

Three categories of students that are included in the statewide reporting of CSAP scores are not included in the calculations of school performance indicators for school report cards. These three categories are:

- Students taking the CSAP-Alternate;
- Students whose dominant language is not English and who have been enrolled in Colorado public schools less than two years (grade 3) or three years (grades 4-10); and
- Students transferring from another state after October 1.

***Assessments and the Colorado Basic Literacy Act.*** The Colorado Basic Literacy Act, implemented through House Bill 97-1249, monitors progress of early elementary students to ensure that all Colorado students possess necessary literacy skills by the end of grade three. Each school district annually tests the reading readiness of each kindergarten student and the literacy and reading comprehension skills of each first, second, and third grade student. Districts are required to develop an Individual Literacy Plan (ILP) for each student whose skills are determined to be below grade level. One of the assessments required under the Colorado Basic Literacy Act is the third grade CSAP reading assessment, although individual assessments designated by the district are required as well.