

Testing in California Public Schools (Part 1)

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Information About the Star Program

When you read or listen to the news, or talk to your child's teacher, you frequently hear the California STAR Test mentioned. This test is very important to schools, and therefore important to you and your child. Every parent and guardian of a student in California public schools should be aware of, and know a bit about, the STAR Test and how it effects your child's education.

What Is the Star Program?

The Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program is California's state assessment system for public schools. It is administered annually in the spring—in March, April, and May, depending on the individual school and district—in grades two through eleven. The STAR Program was first authorized in 1997 and reauthorized until 2011 by state law (Education Code Section 60640). Tests in the STAR Program measure how well students in California public schools are learning the knowledge and skills identified in the California Content Standards (www.cde.ca.gov/be/st/ss/).

What Are the Star Tests?

The STAR Program for 2009 includes these six tests:

- The California Standards Tests (CSTs) measure the achievement of California content standards in English-Language Arts, Mathematics, Science, and History-Social Science (for grades two through eleven).
- The California Achievement Tests, Sixth Edition (CAT/6 Survey) measure the achievement of general academic knowledge in core subjects. These norm-referenced tests provide national comparisons (for grades three and seven only).
- The California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA) measures the achievement of California content standards in English-Language Arts, Mathematics, and Science. This alternate assessment is for students who have significant cognitive disabilities and cannot

take the CSTs even with accommodations or modifications (for grades two through eleven).

- The California Modified Assessment (CMA) measures the achievement of California content standards in English-Language arts, Mathematics, and Science. This assessment is for students with disabilities who meet CMA eligibility criteria approved by the State Board of Education (for grades three through five in 2008).
- The Standards-based Tests in Spanish (STS) measure the achievement of California content standards in Reading-Language Arts and Mathematics in Spanish. This assessment is for Spanish-speaking English learners (for grades two through seven in 2008).
- The Aprenda, La prueba de logros en español, Tercera edición (Aprenda 3) measures the achievement of general academic knowledge in Spanish. This norm-referenced test is for Spanish-speaking English learners (for grades eight through eleven in 2009).

The majority of California's students only take the CSTs.

When Is the Star Test Given in Schools?

The STAR testing schedule for the administration of all of the STAR tests is a 21-day window for each school, program, and track, comprised of the 10 days before and 10 days after the day on which 85 percent of the instructional year is completed. All regular and make-up testing must be completed within the 21-day window.

What Are the Levels of Student Performance on the California Standards Tests (CSTs)?

Under the STAR program, California students attain one of five levels of performance on the CSTs for each subject tested:

- Advanced
- Proficient

- Basic
- Below basic
- Far below basic

The State Board of Education has established the proficient level as the desired achievement goal for all students. This goal is consistent with school growth targets for state accountability and the federal No Child Left Behind requirements. The eventual target is for all students to score at the proficient or advanced level.

Who Takes the Tests in the Star Program?

All students in grades 2 through 11 participate in the STAR Program, including students with disabilities and students who are English learners. Approximately 4.8 million students participate in the STAR program. In addition to the tests administered in English, state law requires all Spanish-speaking English learners to take the designated primary language test (DPLT) if they receive instruction in Spanish (regardless of how long they have been in school in the United States), or have been enrolled in a school in the United States for less than 12 months (cumulative). At the option of the district, schools may also test English learners who will have been in a United States school 12 months or more (cumulative) and who are not receiving instruction in Spanish. For spring 2009, the DPLT is the STS in grades 2 through 7 and the Aprenda 3 in grades eight through eleven.

Summary of the Mathematics CST Results

Below is a partial summary of statewide student performance on the Mathematics CST for 2007:

- Overall, students in all grades and courses scoring at proficient and advanced levels in mathematics showed an increase of approximately 6 percent between 2003 and 2007. However, the overall percentage of students scoring at proficient and advanced remains unchanged from last year.
- The greatest improvements over the four-year period in achieving proficient and advanced were made by students in grades three (12 percent), four (12 percent), five (14 percent), and seven (10 percent).
- Modest declines were observed in grade 7 (-1), General Mathematics (-1), and Geometry (-2) from 2007.
- Nearly three-quarters of a million students took the Algebra I test. Of the 741,152 students who


took the Algebra I test, 26 percent of the first-time test-takers scored proficient and advanced and 15 percent of the repeat test-takers scored proficient and advanced.

- While all student subgroups have continued to improve since 2003, the gap in achievement between African-Americans and Caucasians and the gap in achievement between Hispanics and Caucasians remain unchanged.

Additional CST Information and Results

The California Department of Education provides much more detailed information on the STAR test program on its web site star.cde.ca.gov/. Here is a partial list of the information available:

- STAR 2008 Test Results, Revised 16-Sep-2008: School, District, County and Statewide Summary Results.
- STAR 2008 News Release, 14-Aug-2008
- STAR 2008 Research File Layout
- Designated Primary Language Test (DPLT) —Aprenda
- Pearson Report Site
- Explaining 2008 Internet Reports to the Public (PDF; 1,360KB; 66pp.)
- Prior Year STAR Data and Additional Information, including CST, SAT/9, and CAT/6 results for the STAR tests of 1998 through 2007
- Slides, Blueprints, Guides, Released Test Questions, Assistance Packets
- Number of Items and Times, Updates/Notes, Answer Documents

Parents can also find results by school, school district, and county levels here. Since testing now plays such an important role in education in California, every parent and guardian can benefit by knowing more about the STAR Program. 

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