



Mark Higgins, Communications Director  
364 South Park Street  
509.526.6716  
509.520.6242 (cell)  
509.529.7713  
mhiggins@wwps.org

---

# Washington Comprehensive Assessment Program

## *Frequently Asked Questions*

---

### **Why does State Superintendent Randy Dorn want to replace the WASL?**

New State Superintendent Randy Dorn wants the new tests to be shorter, computerized and provide more timely feedback. Dorn unveiled his plans for a new state assessment system beginning in 2010, including the replacement of the Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL).

Dorn said he was elected on a promise to replace the WASL with a fairer, less expensive system of measuring student learning. He said he intends to do what is right for students and schools and wants to deliver on that promise as quickly as is possible.

### **What will the new assessment program be called?**

The new state assessment system will be called the Washington Comprehensive Assessment Program (WCAP).

### **Dorn has six goals related to state testing:**

- Shorten the tests
- Reduce the amount of time students spend on written responses
- Return scores more quickly
- Increase the use of technology (statewide computer testing)
- Provide more diagnostic information (strengths and weaknesses) to teachers/families
- Minimize costs

### **When will the changes take place?**

Because of time constraints, Dorn said no changes can be made to the WASL during this school year. However, beginning in spring 2010, the state will replace the WASL with two new tests: the Measurements of Student Progress (MSP) in grades 3-8 and the High School Proficiency Exams, (HSPE).

### **How will the Grades 3-8 Measurement of Student Progress tests be administered?**

The grades 3-8 Measurements of Student Progress (MSP) tests will be offered twice each school year, beginning in the fall of 2010. This allows students the opportunity to show proficiency more than once and provides diagnostic and educational growth information to better support individualized teaching plans. (See more on the "MSP" below)

### **How will the High School Proficiency Exams be administered?**

The High School Proficiency Exams (HSPE) will be shorter and contain significantly fewer extended answer questions. Computerizing the tests will also allow a much faster turnaround on results, allowing students, teachers and families more timely information on those students who need to be retested. (See more on the "HSPE" below.)

### **Will the High School Proficiency Exams be a high school graduation requirement?**

Yes. There will also be retake opportunities for students who do not meet standards. There will also be make-up opportunities for students who are absent on testing dates.

- MORE -

**Is meeting standards on the existing WASL still a graduation requirement for the Class of 2009?**

Yes, the current system and standards apply for the Class of 2009.

**Why should Freshmen take the WASL this spring?**

Freshmen have had the option of taking the 10th grade Washington Assessment of Student Learning (WASL) during their 9th grade year for several years. Each year more 9th grade students have taken advantage of this opportunity.

Walla Walla Public Schools recommends those freshmen who have signed up to take the Spring 2009 WASL should continue with their plans. Walla Walla High School Principal Darcy Weisner says these students have been taking WASL assessments since the fourth grade and are familiar with the current WASL format and have demonstrated they are ready to meet these standards.

Weisner also reminds students and parents that proficiency on state exams will remain a graduation requirement under Dorn's platform. He recommends they get this requirement completed as soon as possible so they can concentrate on post high school education requirements and career pathways.

**Do current sophomores, juniors and seniors who have not met WASL standards need to take the exams this spring?**

Yes. The state graduation requirements remain in effect and these students must test each year.

**How will the new testing system affect students receiving special education services?**

Superintendent Dorn will convene a work group to study and to recommend changes to the Washington Alternate Assessment System and other alternative assessments for special needs students. For those students unable to test on a computer, a paper-and-pencil test will still be available.

**How will the new assessment system use computers to reduce time and save money?**

Dorn's plan calls for computer-delivered reading, math and science tests to be available as an option to school districts beginning in 2010 with the goal of statewide implementation by 2012. The Office of Superintendent of Public Instruction (OSPI) will look closely at the feasibility of computerized scoring of the writing test. Computerizing the tests will also require far less resources, both in time and money, according to Dorn.

**Will the new assessment program maintain high academic standards?**

Yes. Dorn said he is committed to maintaining high academic standards to prepare students for post high school educational opportunities.

**If you are testing twice each school year, doesn't that take up more time than the WASL?**

No. As opposed to the WASL, the Measurements of Student Progress (MSP) computer tests will provide great flexibility and won't require all students to test at the same time on the same day. Students will be able to test in their school's computer lab at different times on different days, so it does not disrupt the entire school calendar and classroom instruction, according to Dorn.

**Will the math assessments change under Dorn's plan?**

More than likely. Dorn proposes replacing the current math and science tests to review and refine the standards for those content areas. Dorn believes they must ensure the standards are workable and reflect the real-life needs of students. He intends to put forward legislation during this legislative session to delay the effective dates of the graduation requirements tied to those standards and tests until the State Board of Education can make a finding that they are "valid and reliable."

- MORE -

**How will this impact No Child Left Behind requirements?**

Dorn proposes moving the spring “accountability test,” which meets the requirements set by the federal No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB), to later in the spring. He said OSPI will continue to study NCLB requirements and how to use the new assessment system to meet these requirements.

**What are Dorn's timelines for new math and science standards? (subject to change per requested legislation)**

- Tests for grades 3-8 will measure the new math standards in 2010
- Tests for grades 5 and 8 will measure new science standards in 2011
- High school math and science tests will measure the new math and science standards in 2011

**What are Dorn's beliefs regarding learning standards and curriculum?**

- Dorn supports the current reading and writing standards, but we must always monitor how they are working in meeting our goals for our students. The standards should only be changed if and when we determine that they are falling behind the real skills needed for kids to succeed.
- Dorn will be asking the legislature to remove the 2013 deadline for the math and science graduation requirements. It will be difficult to design an assessment based on the current science standards. The new math standards are an improvement, but we must continue to review them and propose improvements while we move ahead with the new assessment.
- The requirement to earn two math credits after 10th grade for those students who do not meet standard on the high school math assessment should remain, according to Dorn.
- Dorn supports the move to end-of-course testing in math. The last year of the high school math WASL, if approved by the Legislature, will be 2010 (the current law calls for 2013). Four end-of-course exams will be implemented in 2011 (Algebra I, Geometry, Integrated I and II). A “core math” test measuring first and second year high school math will be available as a graduation alternative starting in 2011.
- Regarding math curriculum, Dorn supports the recommendations of the State Board of Education consultants and he will not be advancing the “Bridges” curriculum for grades K-5.

- MORE-

### **Measurements of Student Progress (MSP) in Grades 3-8**

The MSP will differ from the WASL in numerous and significant ways. The grades 3-8 tests will be used as tools for teachers to evaluate the progress of students with almost immediate feedback.

The grades 3-8 MSP tests will be:

Shorter, both in time required to take the test and the number of days needed to administer it. Key components OSPI plans to implement, are:

- Reducing the number of “long answer” questions in reading, math and science from the current 40 percent of the WASL to no more than a quarter of the new tests. (Note: We are also examining the ways to shorten the time it takes for the writing test)
- Shortening the reading passages on which the questions are formulated in the reading test.
- Including “completion” items in reading and math tests, where students provide a short response (for example, a single number or one/two words). These items require more than a multiple choice item and are easily adaptable to computerized testing.
- Making testing available twice during the school year in the spring and fall. We want to afford students more than one chance to show proficiency, and provide diagnostic and growth information to support individualized teaching plans.
- Designing the tests for each subject area to be administered in a single sitting, allowing for students to possibly test in two subjects in one day.

Less expensive and tied to technology. This means:

- Students will be able to take the grades 3-8 reading, writing, math and science MSP tests on a computer. This will reduce costs and allow for a rapid response for students and teachers.
- Computerized testing will begin as an option in 2010 and expand in 2011, with the goal of it becoming a statewide requirement by 2012. We will also look closely at the feasibility of computerized scoring of the writing test, further reducing costs.

**High School Proficiency Exams (HSPE)** The High School Proficiency Exams (HSPE) will measure whether students have learned the required basic skills in reading, writing, math and science. Dorn strongly believes in high standards and in using the reading and writing tests as part of our graduation requirements. It is also my commitment to streamline and make more readily available alternative steps to reach graduation. As with the MSPs, the HSPE will be shorter and contain significantly fewer extended answer questions.

Also, with computerization, we will be able to receive results on a faster turnaround, affording students, families and teachers better and more timely information to assist those who need to be retested time to do so. We will pilot computerizing the reading and science test in 2010. The new end-of-course tests in math mandated by the Legislature are scheduled for 2011, and those will also be available on computer.

We have the goal of statewide computerized testing in 2012, greatly reducing the resources needed to administer these tests, cutting down on storage costs and requiring far less staff time in our school districts. Our current test contractors have a proven track record of computer testing in other states. We are confident they will be able to adapt to our new assessment plan. We will continue to examine additional improvements to the high school tests, but we must ensure that any changes we make are tied to the graduation requirements and other guidelines outlined in the 1993 education reforms, for which Dorn led the writing and passage of as chair of the House Education Committee.

#### **Additional Information:**

For more information or questions regarding these changes, please contact Communications Director Mark Higgins, 509.526.6716 or [mhiggins@wwps.org](mailto:mhiggins@wwps.org).

###