**OpEd TEMPLATE:**

*New California Assessments: Improving Teaching and Learning*

Last week while visiting a class at [x school ] in [x city] I witnessed something that has become more and more common in classrooms across California—students engaged in an animated and passionate conversation about how to solve a math problem. With California’s new, higher academic standards, we’re not just teaching kids to memorize formulas, we’re teaching them to understand the concepts behind them and apply them to real world problems. As a result, teachers in my district are hearing from students who tell them they used to think math was boring, but now feel smart understanding why the solutions work. It is a change that is good for students, good for teachers and good for California’s future. [Tailor the opening paragraph to a recent classroom experience in your district.]

Because the things we want students to know and be able to do have changed, our tests must change as well. Remember the multiple-choice bubble tests you took in school? They are a thing of the past. Starting [this week], our students in third through eighth grade and in grade 11 will begin taking California’s new computer-based tests as part of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress.

Like the standards they are testing, these assessments will replace the memorization and fill in the blank tests of the past and instead simulate real-life problem solving and critical thinking skills. Because these tests are computer adaptive, they provide students a wide range of questions tailored to identify the knowledge and skills they have mastered.

These new tests provide a clearer measurement of the skills students need to know when they graduate. And just as important, they give teachers the feedback they need to improve instruction so we can refine our practices and give students the best possible preparation for college and their careers.

Results from these tests will be available to teachers, schools and school districts much more quickly than results from previous tests. Plus the new assessment system is designed to measure student growth over time which was not possible in California’s previous system.

Because these are brand new tests, it means the results aren’t comparable to earlier scores. This year’s results will be the first from these new assessments and establish a baseline for the progress we expect students to make over time.

Parents, I want to set expectations upfront. Just like the standards they measure, these tests are more challenging and scores will reflect that. Knowing the bar has been raised, we expect many (if not most) students will need time and support to make significant progress to reach the standards. Be assured the results won’t be used to determine whether a student moves on to the next grade. Instead, the scores will give teachers important information to help students develop the critical thinking and problem solving skills they will need to succeed in the next stages of their lives.

In addition to higher academic standards, changes like greater community control of education dollars and more resources dedicated to our students with the greatest needs are making a difference in classrooms across the state. Our students are more engaged in their learning, and will have a brighter future because of it. Let’s support our students as they get a chance to show us what they know and what they can do on these new tests.