

Central San Joaquin Valley schools begin new computerized state tests

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The Fresno Bee April 7, 2014 Updated 15 hours ago

<http://www.fresnobee.com/2014/04/07/3865554/central-san-joaquin-valley-schools.html?sp=/99/217/&ihp=1>



The Fresno Bee Common Core mathematics teaching material in a kindergarten class at Williams Elementary on Sept. 5, 2013 in Fresno. **ERIC PAUL ZAMORA — THE FRESNO BEE**

DEL REY — Third-grader Lucia Galvez was nervous after the school bell rang early Monday morning at Del Rey Elementary: like her schoolmates, Galvez was getting ready to show her skills on the new Common Core computerized state tests.

Galvez doesn't have a computer at home, but for weeks has practiced keyboarding and other basic computer skills at school. She's trained on her relative's computer, too, to brush up before the exam.

"My uncle has a computer," the 8-year-old said, adding that she's asked family members to "show me how to learn to type, and all that stuff."

After months of prepping for California's new computerized state assessments, called the Smarter Balanced Consortium Field Tests, schools across the Valley are now rolling out the high-tech exam. State officials report schools have run into few problems -- good news for the state, which has invested \$1.25 billion to help prepare for the tests.

"It's been, 'Where do I get my password?' or just kind of minor things," said Cindy Kazanis, California Department of Education director of educational data management.

The online math and English assessments -- which replace the pencil-and-paper STAR standardized test -- quiz kids on the new and more rigorous Common Core standards. This year is a trial run, so students' scores won't count, but districts will have a chance to smooth out the test's kinks.

Monday was the first day of testing at Del Rey Elementary -- part of the Sanger Unified School District -- where youngsters are trying out a new set of Apple computers installed a few months ago.

"We had very little technology, so there's a lot of catching up to do," said Sam Polanco, testing coordinator at the school. "We had one to two computers in each classroom, a few in the library, nothing to this scale here."

Third-graders have spent a lot of time in the new computer lab, he said, learning how to open a web browser window, type in answer boxes and distinguish right clicks from left clicks on their mouse. Students in Del Rey's upper grades have their own iPads and have practiced on those devices.

Like Sanger Unified, districts across the Valley have invested millions of dollars in hand-helds and desktop computers in anticipation of the tests. Fresno Unified chipped in \$7.8 million to buy 15,000 Asus tablets, which will be used to test 32,000 students starting Tuesday. Clovis Unified -- which began testing on Monday -- spent \$4.5 million on 6,500 Lenovo laptops.

Schools have administered practice tests over several months in preparation for testing, said Debbie Parra, assistant superintendent for curriculum and instruction at Clovis Unified. After the first day of exams, she said, schools reported only minor glitches.

"Anytime you do some type of assessment, there's little things that go wrong," she said.

As of last week, state officials say, 203,940 tests were completed statewide; more than 3 million California students will test by June.

Data gathered by the California Department of Education during the first week of testing shows an average of 524 people called or emailed each day asking for technical help. That amounts to a daily call to the state's hotline from about one out of every two California school districts.

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