

The argument:
A DROP IN SCORES IS PROOF

Opponents will use dropped scores as proof the tests are bad or too hard—it's the path of least resistance to blame the test. Parents might fear their kids aren't doing well, or as well as they thought they were.

FIRST FIND COMMON GROUND.

"It's true. Test scores did drop. But it's not cause for alarm when you really understand why scores dropped and what it means."

THEN PIVOT TO A HIGHER EMOTION: PEACE OF MIND.

"We expected scores to drop, and we know why they did. These new tests provide parents with a better measurement. They're a reset, a new baseline, not a drop. They make it possible for you to really know how your child is doing."

DOs ↑

- 1 Do explain why scores have dropped.

"A lower score doesn't mean your school is doing worse or your kids are learning less. It simply means the tests changed. Now they're a better gauge of how your kids are doing in reading and math. This is a reset, not a failure. This is the first true baseline of your child's math and reading skills."

"We expected this drop in scores. Any time you change a test scores drop. We know that. Anything that's new has a learning curve."

- 2 Do talk about the benefit of improved tests.

"These are better tests. They actually measure real learning and understanding, not just memorization like the old tests. They provide parents and teachers with a much clearer picture of where students are, and what we need to do to move them forward. These are test worth taking."

- 3 Do connect tests to higher standards.

"The new tests are different because they line up with new higher standards. We've raised the bar. We want kids to be successful and prepared for what's ahead. It only makes sense that our tests should reflect these standards. And whenever you raise the bar it takes some time to catch up."

"Life today is more complex than when we were kids. What your children need to know and do is different from what we did. So we've raised the bar. These are 21st century standards and 21st century tests for 21st century kids."

- 4 Do talk about the resiliency of kids.

"Kids make lots of transitions—to the next grade, the next age group, the next team—and sometimes that means they're no longer 'the best' or #1. Having setbacks is part of how kids grow. These new tests may be more challenging at first, but kids will catch up. They always rise to the level of the kids around them, and to the expectations we set."

DON'Ts ↓

- 1 Don't overly rely on messages about the economy, jobs, and college readiness, especially when talking to parents who have very young kids.

"For your kids to succeed in this economy they have to meet higher learning standards. We need to start preparing kids for college and career in kindergarten."

- 2 Don't generalize. Get specific about what's going on in your state. Know the details.

- 3 Don't make it sound like you've changed tests for change sake. The tests have been improved, and for good reason.

"We changed the test to reflect higher learning goals for kids—what kids need to know to be successful today."

- 4 Don't make it sound like the tests are an intellectual workout, just to make it harder for kids.

HAUNTED BY THE PAST?

Were there any recent examples of dropped scores (like a change in the cut score) in your community that had negative consequences? Be ready to acknowledge them, and separate what's happening now from recent history.

AUDIENCE SHIFTS

BUSINESS
It's okay to connect new standards and tests to jobs and the economy.

TEACHERS
Respect that change means more work for teachers. Acknowledge that they need help and resources from their district.



WATCH OUT FOR RABBIT HOLES

Know how the new tests in your state compare to the old ones. Do they take more time to administer or less? How much did they cost? What are the consequences for a drop in scores? If you get pulled into the weeds, be prepared. Tell the best story you can about your state.