

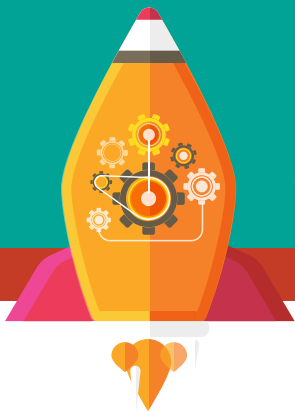
A BIG WIN FOR CALIFORNIA STUDENTS



The Smarter Balanced Assessments

California schools are undergoing a period of significant and fundamental remodeling. These changes have been years in the making and represent a new focus on preparing schools and students to thrive in the 21st century economy. The state has adopted a Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) that directs resources to high-priority students, and districts are currently in the process of adopting evaluation rubrics to help identify their strengths and weaknesses. One of the most significant changes occurred in 2010, when California schools began implementing the Common Core State Standards in English language arts (ELA) and math. These more rigorous standards provide the roadmap of skills students need to graduate prepared for college and careers. While these efforts are underway, state policymakers are also working on remodeling the state's accountability system, which includes better ways to measure student outcomes through the use of improved aligned assessments.





A BIG WIN FOR CALIFORNIA STUDENTS

Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

The next phase of this work is to implement an improved test that is more meaningful to students, teachers, and parents in determining which skills a student has or has not yet mastered. The state needs a test that can measure the critical thinking and problem solving skills that our students need to succeed—and existing state tests cannot evaluate this level of learning. Improved assessments present an opportunity to move beyond tests that simply measure rote memorization skills to ones that mirror the higher standards and provide teachers with valuable information on how effectively they are teaching and students are learning.

For the past four years, teams of teachers, academics, and testing experts have been working tirelessly to create a testing option aligned to the Common Core State Standards through the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. The Smarter Balanced test was field tested in spring 2014 in 21 states, including California.

This test aims to do the following:

- Accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness.
- Assess a wide range of skills, including real-world critical thinking and writing skills.
- Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning.

California became a member of the Smarter Balanced consortium in 2010 to develop aligned tests known as the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP). These computer-adaptive tests (CAT) will be given to students in grades 3–8 and 11 this spring. The difficulty of questions is adjusted based on a student's responses, so it measures a greater range and depth of content and provides a more accurate measure of progress. The tests were specifically designed to help teachers and parents know how students are progressing and provide important

feedback on what students have mastered and where they are struggling. The Smarter Balanced assessments are a significant upgrade from the previous tests and measure more than just the skills that can be measured with multiple choice questions. The system also includes regular check-in activities so that teachers know how students are thinking about solving problems and where they need additional instruction. Scores from the first administration of the assessments will provide the baseline information about student performance and will allow the state, schools, and parents to see improvement over time.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how California students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the CAASPP assessments because they meet so many of the criteria that make up a high-quality aligned test. As advocates, we need to ensure that our state tests accurately measure college and career readiness, and have these characteristics to serve as a useful tool to benefit students.

A High-Quality Assessment:

- Is developed with input from academic and testing experts, as well as teachers.
- Is field tested and reviewed before full implementation.
- Assesses a wide range of real-world skills using a variety of question formats.
- Includes formative or interim assessments that act as academic checkups to ensure that students are keeping pace.
- Provides detailed and timely feedback that acts as an academic checkup.
- Sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are not on track so that interventions can be put in place.
- Is comparable across states.

The improvements underway in California schools—including the adoption of the Common Core Standards, the implementation of the Smarter Balanced assessments, and the remodeling of the accountability and funding systems—provide a positive outlook for schools and students. The Smarter Balanced assessments, in particular, are a key element in preparing students for the demands of the 21st century. This is a multi-faceted, multi-year endeavor and districts and teachers are working diligently to successfully implement these changes. California needs all stakeholders to work together to provide the support needed during this period of transition to help students succeed.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. Will the new test replace the old state test?

- Yes. The Smarter Balanced CAASPP tests will replace the previous state tests that were administered in grades 3–8 and 11 in ELA and math.

2. What will test scores look like this year?

- Students will answer more open-ended questions and solve more complex problems, which was not required on the previous state tests, so scores may be lower in the first year. Scores will be used as new baseline information about students' mastery of the standards and will allow the state, schools, and parents to see improvement over time.
- The CAASPP tests cannot be compared to previous tests because the bar has been raised for students. Kentucky and Tennessee, among the earliest adopters of the Common Core Standards, have seen increased achievement overall and decreased achievement gaps, which is evidence that the standards can work for all students.



Better Assessments:

- Give an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- Ensure all students are held to the same expectations.
- Identify struggling students so they can get the help they need.
- Identify high-achieving students to provide them with the resources necessary to continue to excel.

Smarter Balanced:

- A group of states working together to develop high-quality, computer-based assessments that measure college and career readiness in both math and English language arts.

3. What kind of data will be collected? Will it be released?

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, California is required to collect data on school performance. Aggregate data collected includes student test scores and information such as attendance, support services, and academic growth. *The state does not release any personally identifiable student information.* Only individuals who interact with students on a daily basis, such as teachers and parents, are allowed to see student-specific information. Federal law protects the privacy of student information and education records through the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA).
- The California legislature also passed the Student Online Personal Information Protection Act (SOPIPA), which is designed to protect students' information from being provided to third-party vendors.

4. How were teachers involved in the test development process?

- California teachers were involved in a review of the test questions for content, bias/sensitivity, and accessibility. They also assisted with the development of learning resources in the Digital Library, an online collection of aligned resources to support teachers as they adjust to teaching the standards.

5. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students need to be computer literate. Paper and pencil versions will be available during the first three years of the new testing for schools that cannot meet the technology requirement.
- While it may take time to ensure that every school has the hardware necessary and meets the technology requirements, this is a smart investment. Technology is not going away. Ensuring that all students, regardless of geography or household income, have equal access to technology is critical to preparing students for a 21st century competitive workforce.

6. Where can I go for more information?

- www.smarterbalanced.org
- www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/index.asp
- www.BusinessForCore.org