

A BIG WIN FOR IDAHO STUDENTS



Idaho's Core Standards

In 2013, Idaho's on-time high school graduation rate was 84%—better than all but nine states. That same year, more than 75% of 4th and 8th grade students were proficient in both math and reading on the state assessment, the Idaho Standards Achievement Test (ISAT). Unfortunately, there was another story to be told. On the Nation's Report Card, also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), far less than half of students in every grade tested reached proficiency in each subject. In spring 2014, Idaho field tested a new assessment, and again student proficiency rates were far lower than ISAT scores had led parents and students to believe.

Idaho's Proficiency Results on Standardized Assessments

Assessment	4th Grade Math	4th Grade Reading	8th Grade Math	8th Grade Reading
2013 NAEP	40%	33%	36%	38%
2013 ISAT	86%	90%	80%	94%
2014 Field Test	37%	41%	32%	41%

In 2011, after a year of public meetings and review sessions, the State Board of Education adopted a set of college- and career-ready standards—the Idaho Core Standards—to raise the bar for Idaho students. Teachers began instructing the content and skills outlined in the standards in 2013. The improved standards are more focused, clearer, and help ensure that students will graduate prepared for success in college and careers. Although the previous state standards covered most of the essential content, they were vague, repetitive, and difficult to accurately interpret. In the U.S. Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, the state received a C in rigor and in college and workforce readiness.

With the adoption of higher standards, Idaho is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 63% of jobs in Idaho will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 35% of adults in the state currently have this credential, resulting in a 29% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to closing this gap and ensuring Idaho students are prepared for future jobs.



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Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

For years, teachers across Idaho have been hard at work preparing and implementing these standards. It has been a significant undertaking involving countless hours of professional development, aligning curricula and instructional materials, and learning strategies to engage students more deeply in their learning.

The next phase of this work is to implement aligned assessments that are more meaningful to students, teachers, and parents in determining which skills a student has and has not yet mastered. The state needs a test that measures the critical-thinking and problem-solving skills our students need to succeed. The ISAT is not capable of measuring higher level skills and clearly does not provide an accurate picture of student achievement. Furthermore, it does little to inform teacher instruction. High-quality assessments should mirror the standards, providing teachers with valuable information on how effectively they are instructing and students are learning.

For the past four years, teams of academic experts and teachers have been working tirelessly to create two testing options aligned to college- and career-ready standards: PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness of College and Careers) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Idaho has been a member of Smarter Balanced since 2010, and it administered the first field test in all Idaho schools in spring 2014. The Smarter Balanced summative tests will replace ISAT, and as of spring 2015, students in grades 3–8 and 11 will take the updated assessments in math, reading, and writing. Districts have the option of giving the tests to students in grades 9 and 10 as well.

The tests aim 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.

The Smarter Balanced assessments come with resources that far exceed the capabilities of previous state assessments. These new resources provide students with benefits that were not possible with the ISAT—and at a 10% lower cost to the state and taxpayers.

The comprehensive assessment system not only includes end-of-year tests but also interim and formative tests that can be given at various points throughout the year. The interim tests, like the summative, provide detailed student reports to indicate how well students are mastering skills. This information provides an opportunity for deeper engagement for parents, teachers, and students—as well as an opportunity to improve teaching and learning. These reports serve as academic checkups and enable teachers to identify and target students who need extra support, increasing their chances for success on the summative test. Since the interim tests so closely mirror the summative tests, it is possible to compare one score with the other and use the scores as a measure of student progress. In addition, assessments can identify high-achieving students who require additional support to maintain their academic engagement and provide them with the resources to continue to excel.

The tests go beyond the multiple-choice assessments of the past by involving students in test items that more closely reflect classroom learning. They include a variety of question formats and tools to help all students access the material. With the ISAT, students with disabilities and English language learners were offered only five accommodations. With the Smarter Balanced assessments, they will have up to 50 supports or accommodations.

At the heart of the assessments and accountability is the need to ensure that all students across Idaho receive the same high-quality education. Meaningful tests serve as school-wide checkups that can identify struggling students and schools in need of extra support so interventions can be put in place. While adjusting to higher standards and more demanding assessments takes time, they improve instruction and achievement for all students. Better assessments mean more effective instruction and use of interventions. As supporters, we need to ensure that our state tests accurately measure college and career readiness and have the following characteristics.

A High-Quality Assessment

- Is developed with input from both academic and test experts—and most importantly, 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 sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are struggling so that interventions can be put in place.
- Identifies high-achieving students who could benefit from additional resources.
- Is comparable across states so that students who move from one state to another will be held to the same standards and have a smoother transition.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the difference between standards and curriculum?

- Standards are a set of guidelines for what students are expected to know and be able to do at specific points in their education. Standards provide the foundation for key components of the education system, including curricula, instructional materials, teacher training, and assessments.
- A curriculum is the course of study covering the standards. It is set by local school districts and includes the lesson plans, programs, and textbooks that teachers use to teach the content and skills outlined in the standards.

2. If students are learning with different curricula, how can they take the same test?

- Although teachers use different materials and curricula, students still learn the same skills outlined in the standards. Teachers can be creative in their instruction, designing lessons to best reach their students and establishing a classroom where all students can achieve.

The Idaho Core Standards

- Are aligned with college and workforce expectations.
- Are clear, understandable and consistent.
- Include rigorous content, knowledge and higher-order skills.
- Build upon strengths and lessons of Idaho state standards to date.
- Were informed by standards in other top-performing countries.
- Are evidence-based.

Better Assessments

- Give us an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- Ensure all students are held to the same expectations.
- Identify struggling students so that they can get the help they need.

Smarter Balanced

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

3. Will the new test replace the old test?

- The Smarter Balanced assessments will replace the ISAT in math and English language arts. Students will continue to take the ISAT in science.

4. Will test scores impact schools and districts?

- Results from the first administration of the Smarter Balanced test will not be used for any school or state accountability purposes.

5. How will test scores impact teachers?

- Student growth factors, which can include standardized test scores, are worth 33% of a teacher's evaluation. However, scores for the first year of the Smarter Balanced assessments will not be used in evaluations.

6. How will test scores impact students?

- Beginning with the class of 2017, students will have to pass the 11th grade test in ELA and math to graduate. To allow students time to adjust to the higher standards and more rigorous assessments, students will only need to achieve a 9th grade proficiency level. The class of 2020 will be the first class required to reach the 11th grade proficiency level.

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

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Idaho 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 will 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 only information that will be publicly available will contain aggregate data for schools, districts, and subgroups.
- The Idaho State Legislature passed a data privacy law that prohibits sharing student identifiable information with outside agencies and limits the data collected on students.

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

- Idaho teachers played an integral role in the development of the Smarter Balanced assessments. Thirty teachers participated in writing test questions for the field test, and 60 wrote lessons for the Digital Library, a collection of resources and lessons to help teachers implement the standards.
- More than 115 math and ELA teachers applied to attend the in-person panel for achievement-level setting. Twenty-one were selected for the in-person panel, and 80 participated in an online panel.
- Sixty teachers served as panelists on the Bias and Sensitivity Committee in December 2014. Along with parents, teachers will continue to review the individual student reports to improve their readability.
- Idaho teachers will continue to play a role and can apply to grade tests this spring.

9. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students need to be computer literate, but this is not new for Idaho. Students in grades 3–8 and 10 have taken tests online since 2002.
- On a field test student survey conducted by the Idaho Department of Education, 85% of students indicated they knew how to use a keyboard; only 2% responded that they did not know how.
- 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.

10. Where can I go for more information?

- www.idahocorestandards.org
- www.sde.idaho.gov
- www.idaho.portal.airast.org
- www.smarterbalanced.org
- www.BusinessforCore.org