

A BIG WIN FOR VERMONT STUDENTS



The Common Core State Standards

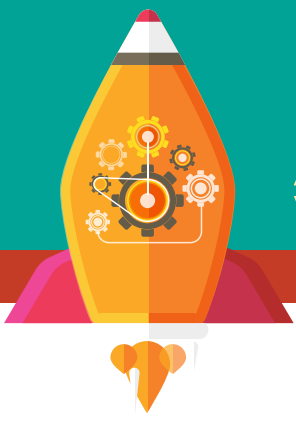
In 2014, Vermont's on-time graduation rate was higher than many other states at 87%. On the 2012 New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP), more than two-thirds of Vermont's 4th and 8th grade students demonstrated proficiency in reading and math. The Nation's Report Card (also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP) told a slightly different story. Despite consistently performing among the top five states on the NAEP, in 2013, less than half of Vermont's 4th and 8th students demonstrated proficiency in both subjects (with the exception of 4th grade math). In 2014, only 40% of Vermont students who took the ACT met the minimum scores for college readiness in all four subjects (English, math, reading, and science). Vermont students were graduating high school and achieving proficiency on the state assessments, but did not have the skills necessary for success after high school. Recognizing this disconnect, in 2011 the State Board of Education adopted a set of college- and career-ready standards in English language arts (ELA) and math to help ensure that students were learning the skills necessary for successful futures.

With the adoption of higher standards, Vermont is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 66% of jobs in Vermont will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 44% of adults in the state currently have such a credential, resulting in a 22% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to helping close this gap.

Vermont's Proficiency Rates
on the 2013 Nation's Report Card and
2012 NECAP*

Assessment	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2013 NAEP	52%	42%	47%	45%
2012 NECAP	68%	70%	64%	80%

* For the 2013–14 school year, 27 schools participated in the Smarter Balanced field test in lieu of administering the fall NECAP assessments. The State Department of Education reported that there was evidence to suggest that the exclusion of these schools made statewide results unrepresentative, and that these statewide results should not be included in state-level comparison. Therefore, 2012 NECAP data was used for this chart instead of 2013 NECAP data.



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Better Standards Need Better Assessments

Teachers across Vermont have been hard at work putting these higher academic goals in place since their adoption. It has been a significant undertaking involving countless hours of professional development, developing curricula, and learning strategies to engage students more deeply than ever before.

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 previous state tests only partially evaluated this level of learning. Improved assessments present an opportunity to implement evidence-based, next-generation tests that provide teachers with valuable information on how effectively they are teaching and students are learning.

Putting better assessments in place needs to be part of a larger system of accountability that supports student achievement and holds schools accountable for successfully teaching the content outlined in the standards. At the heart of accountability is the need to ensure that all students across Vermont receive a high-quality education. Meaningful tests serve as school-wide academic checkups that can identify struggling students and schools in need of extra support and interventions. In addition, improved assessments can identify high-achieving students who require support to maintain their academic engagement and provide them with the resources necessary to continue to excel.

For the past four years, teams of academics, testing experts, and teachers have been working tirelessly to create two testing options aligned to the higher standards: the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and Partnership for Assessment of

Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC). These two tests were field tested in spring 2014 in 35 states, of which 21 participated in the Smarter Balanced test. In Vermont, 5,700 students in 27 schools took the Smarter Balanced field test.

The tests aim to do the following:

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

Vermont has been a member of Smarter Balanced since 2010. The Smarter Balanced assessment system includes a summative end-of-year test, as well as a Digital Library that contains teacher resources on in-class formative assessments to monitor student progress. Teachers can also give interim assessments throughout the year to ensure that students are keeping pace. These assessments will provide teachers with timely, meaningful feedback so that they can implement additional supports or interventions if needed. The Smarter Balanced assessments will replace the NECAP for students in grades 3–8 and 11 in ELA and math.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how Vermont students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the Smarter Balanced tests 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 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 sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are not on track so that support services can be put in place.
- Is comparable across states.

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.

3. Does the new test replace the old state test?

- The Smarter Balanced assessments will replace the NECAP in grades 3–8 and 11 in English language arts and math.



The Common Core State Standards:

- Are more rigorous academic standards that prepare all students for success after high school.
- Emphasize real-world skills such as critical thinking and problem solving.
- Are comparable across states.

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.

4. Will annual test scores impact schools and districts?

- School-wide test results will be used as one measure for school accountability. Just as tests are used as academic checkups for individual students, they also serve as checkups for our schools. Districts need to identify struggling students and schools in need of support so that interventions can be put in place to ensure that all students across Vermont receive a high-quality education.

5. How will test scores impact teachers?

- Test scores will provide teachers with actionable data to help improve instruction and the academic performance of individual students. However, test scores are not currently used as a factor in teacher evaluations.

6. How will test scores impact students?

- There are currently no testing requirements for graduation or promotion.

7. What kind of professional development did teachers receive in preparation for the standards and assessments?

- The State Department of Education has provided extensive preparation across the state to prepare for the Smarter Balanced assessments. Beginning in fall 2014, regional workshops were conducted for approximately 1,000 teachers and administrators to familiarize them with the testing software and platform. There have been additional workshops at 15 schools to focus on the computer-based features and accommodations available for students with special needs.
- In addition, the state has created an assessment portal containing a host of online learning modules on the Smarter Balanced assessments.

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

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Vermont 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.

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

- Vermont 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.

10. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Yes. Although Smarter Balanced is offering paper and pencil versions for schools that cannot meet the technology requirement, 100% of Vermont schools are using the computer-based version. Schools recognize the benefit of computer-based testing and some have gone to great lengths to ensure all students have access to it, including transporting students to other locations for testing.
- Although 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.

11. Where can I go for more information?

- www.smarterbalanced.org
- www.education.vermont.gov/sbac
- vt.portal.airast.org
- www.BusinessForCore.org