

A GUIDE TO ASSIST TEACHERS IN CONVERSATIONS WITH PARENTS ABOUT SBAC SCORE REPORTS

In partnership with Smarter Balanced, Learning Heroes, an initiative whose mission is to help parents understand the changes taking place in today's classroom, conducted research to better understand parents' questions upon receipt of their child's score report. The following list originally came from a compilation of parent questions across eight states based on several vendor/state specific versions of Smarter Balanced score reports. In order to better understand the parent who student's score was lower than in the past, they mocked up the score report to reflect level 2 results. They wanted to gauge the questions and reactions of the cohort of parents who might be concerned and reaching out for help. The original document was by Michelle Sanchez, Superintendent/Principal, Manzanita Elementary School District and Michael Morris, Director Assessment & Accountability, Chico Unified. There will be some redundancy in the responses since there are many possible questions listed, some of which overlap. At the end of the document is a separate set of questions from the CA Department of Education entitled *CAASPP Communication FAQs About Smarter Balanced*.

ABOUT INDIVIDUAL STUDENT SCORES

NOTE: *The Guide to Your CAASPP Student Score Report* may be found at this website:
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/caasppsreports.asp>

How can parents use the score reports to help their children? What type of skills and work are in each area and what resources are available?

- The test results will include a breakdown of your child's performance in areas within each subject. This will help you understand where your child is in relation to meeting standards. You can use these results to locate activities online that were designed specifically for each area at every grade level. You can also use the test results to guide a discussion with your child's teacher(s) about additional supports or challenges that may be needed in class, as well as other ways to support your child at home.
- To find resources in every area and at every grade level, visit the Tehama County Department of Education website @ <http://tehamaschools.org/department/educational-support-services/parents-students> . With guidance from your child's teacher, you can use your child's individual score report to find resources that will match his or her areas of strength and areas for improvement.

The skills and work in each area (claim) are identified by the Smarter Balanced targets.

- ELA/Literacy Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment Blueprint ([PDF](#)) ([DocX](#))
http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/ELA_Blueprint.pdf
- Mathematics Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment Blueprint ([PDF](#)) ([DocX](#))
http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/Mathematics_Blueprint.pdf

What does a child need to do to reach Level 3?

- To reach a Level 3, students need to understand and demonstrate that they have met the learning expectations for their grade level as outlined in the new, higher standards adopted by your state. Students do not need to cram or study for this test, because test questions reflect what they are learning and doing in the classroom every day. So the best preparation and practice is through the classwork and homework they complete throughout the year.

What if my child is doing well in the classroom and on his or her report card, but it is not reflected in the test score?

- Smarter Balanced is only one of several measures that illustrate a child's progress in math and ELA. Report card grades can include multiple sources of information like participation, work habits, group projects, homework, etc., that are not reflected in the Smarter Balanced score test, so there may be a discrepancy.

How can teachers help students improve and make progress on next year's test?

- Teachers can use instructional materials and classroom activities aligned with the Smarter Balanced Assessments and student needs. Teachers will gather information about student progress and provide feedback to support student learning. Teachers will use the information in the score reports to help target instruction.

From the score report, is it possible to identify where a student excels and where he or she needs more support and practice?

- Your child's performance in the areas described on the score report will help you understand the progress your child is making and whether they need additional practice or need to be challenged by going deeper into a subject. This score report is one piece of information and a good starting point. Additional information from your student's classroom performance and progress needs to also be reviewed.
- The SBAC math test results are broken down into three areas (claims):
 - Concepts and procedures
 - Problem solving and modeling/data analysis
 - Communicating reasoning
- The SBAC English test results are broken down into four areas (claims):
 - Reading
 - Writing
 - Listening
 - Research and Inquiry
- Each area (claim) is reported to parents on the individual student score report as "Above Standard", "At or Near Standard," or "Below Standard".

How long will it be before progress is evident in student scores?

- This depends on a variety of factors that are difficult to predict. The goal is for each student to show progress each year. This year's scores serve as a baseline to gauge future progress. As teachers spend

more time focusing on the content outlined in the new standards and students gain more practice with the skills, the scores are expected to increase.

What does it mean if a student’s overall performance is below an achievement level of “3” (standard met)? Should students be promoted to the next grade level if they do not achieve Level 3?

- Students who score at Level 3 or Level 4 in English or math have met the standard of the grade level in the subject matter. If your child scored at Level 2, he or she may need additional support to meet the standard in that subject this school year. Students scoring in Level 1 did not meet the standard and will require substantial support to grasp the skills and concepts this school year. These tests are only one of several measures of how well a student is progressing against the standards in math and English, and they do not determine promotion or report card grades.

How was student performance for the areas (claims) in each subject determined?

- The performance levels for the (areas) claims are Above Standard, At or Near Standard, and Below Standard. They provide supplemental information regarding a student’s strengths or weaknesses. Only three achievement levels for claims were developed since there are fewer items within each claim. A score of “No score available” indicates that he or she did not take all the items needed to receive a score in that area. Cut scores were not determined for these levels. Student performance levels for claims were determined based on the distance a student’s performance on the claim from the Level 3 cut score. A student must complete all items within a claim to receive an estimate of his or her performance on a claim.
- Note: ELA and Mathematics Claims can be found on page 5 of this document **Are sample questions in each area available in each grade level?**
- Sample questions are available from the parent guides, training tests and practice tests for both ELA and Math.

Is it possible to identify whether students finished every section of the test?

- Unfortunately this is not part of the score report.

Do teachers receive the same kind of information as parents? If not, what do teachers receive?

- Smarter Balanced provides the same information to teachers. Some states and districts may offer supplementary materials and/or reports to educators.

Why are parents not receiving test scores until September?

- The writing section and performance task questions that require students to explain their reasoning need to be hand-scored, which takes longer to complete. The state is taking great pains to make sure that this year’s scoring is done well. This is frustrating for parents and teachers alike, but hopefully is only a one-year challenge. Next year, the goal is for the scores to be available sooner.

SCORING

Why do the scores look different than scores from previous state tests?

- The scores look different than scores from previous state tests because the tests, the standards and the scoring system are completely different than in past years.
- The new tests are measuring different skills including critical-thinking, opinion/argumentative writing, reasoning and problem-solving, which is different than previous tests. A low score does not mean that your child did not improve or learned less. This first year's scores set a new baseline from which progress will be measured moving forward.

How will students' scores be used?

- Scores are used to identify where a child excels and can be challenged to go deeper into the subject matter, or where he or she needs extra support or practice. In some states, colleges and universities use the Grade 11 test scores to determine course placement.

What types of questions were asked?

- The Smarter Balanced test includes performance tasks, multi-step assignments that ask students to apply their knowledge and skills to address real-world problems. In English, students have to apply their research and writing skills, and in math, they will solve a complex problem and then describe and defend their reasoning.
- The test also includes traditional multiple choice questions, as well as interactive questions that require students to drag and drop their answers into a box, create equations, and fill in the answer. The questions on the test include some real-world skills that are guiding instruction in the classroom: critical-thinking, writing, problem-solving, etc.
 - To see a practice test for your child's grade, visit <http://sbac.portal.airast.org/practice-test/>
- The Smarter Balanced test is computer-adaptive. The questions are personalized and adjust to a student's learning level, by giving harder or easier questions based on how well he or she is doing. This is more interactive and less frustrating for students because they are appropriately challenged throughout the test. It also provides more accurate results, especially for advanced and struggling students. At this time the test adapts approximately one to two grade levels above or below that grade level being tested.

How many questions were there in each subject? Is it possible to know how many questions a student answered correctly?

- Smarter Balanced consists of roughly 35 questions in math and approximately 40 questions in English language arts, plus performance tasks, which is comparable to previous tests. Since the test is computer adaptive, students may get different types and numbers of questions.
- The score report does not indicate how many questions a student answered correctly. The scoring doesn't rely only on the number of correct answers, but the difficulty of each question. If a student does not answer a question, he or she will get the lowest possible score for that question. Questions are scored on a scale and students can earn partial credit. To watch a video that explains the Smarter Balanced test and walks through practice tests in math and English, visit: <http://bealearninghero.org/classroom/smarter-balanced/>

How were the questions scored? Who scored them?

- Final scores represent the ability estimates for students. Once the responses from the PT and CAT portions are merged for final scoring, the resulting ability estimates are based on the responses to the specific test questions that a student answered, not the total number of questions answered correctly. Higher ability estimates are associated with test takers who correctly answer more difficult and more discriminating questions; lower ability estimates are associated with test takers who correctly answer easier and less discriminating questions. Two students will have the same ability estimate if they are scored the same way on an identical collection of items.

ENGLISH:

- For the performance tasks, teams of educators from Smarter Balanced states reviewed and agreed upon student responses to serve as samples or exemplars. Exemplars are concrete examples of student writing in each of the score ranges. They serve as a reference point to ensure that scorers interpret and apply the scoring guides consistently. Professional scorers who have been trained to use the Smarter Balanced exemplars and rubrics then score the individual student responses.
- Short answer and research responses were also scored with exemplars. Each question has 2 points possible for answering the question and providing an explanation using evidence from the text.
- The ELA performance tasks are scored using three criteria:

Scoring Area	Score Range
Organization/purpose	0-4
Evidence/elaboration	0-4
Conventions	0-2

- For examples of full-write exemplars from the performance task, visit: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/Smarter-Balanced-Scoring-Guide-for-ELA-Full-Writes.pdf>

MATH:

- The open-ended math questions were also hand scored with exemplars that were reviewed and agreed upon by educators. The general scale for the math questions is 0 to 2, although some more complex questions are scored on a different point scale. Scores can range from 0 to 4 possible points, depending on the question and grade level, with a 0 being “merely an acquaintance with the topic” to a 4 being a “full and complete understanding of the topic.”
- For the math test, the total score was calculated from the different areas (claims):

Areas (Claims)	Weight
Concepts and procedures	50%
Communicating reasoning	25%
Problem solving, modeling and data analysis	25%

ABOUT THE NEW TESTS

Why do we need a new test and standards?

- A new test was needed to measure the new, more rigorous standards that are guiding teachers' instruction in the classroom in ELA and math. These standards focus on the skills students need in the real world, like critical thinking, analyzing, and problem-solving. The tests reflect the types of activities that students do in the classroom every day.

Why does this test matter for my child?

- The Smarter Balanced test helps parents understand how their child is progressing in math and English language arts/literacy (ELA) and how he or she is performing in comparison to peers in their grade level and school. It also informs parents where their child needs more support or additional challenges, which allows for more personalized instruction. For high school students, more than 200 colleges and universities in seven states, including all California State Universities have agreed to use Smarter Balanced scores to determine course placement. The latest information for California Community Colleges may be found here:
<http://extranet.cccco.edu/Divisions/StudentServices/EAP/AcceptingEAP.aspx>
- To learn more, visit <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/higher-education/>.

If fewer students are meeting the standards on this test than the previous state test, are they really accurate measures of student progress?

- Education leaders in our state expected fewer students to meet the standard. We have raised the bar and set higher expectations at each grade level. The new standards focus on more complex skills, and the tests are designed to accurately measure these skills.

If scores from the Smarter Balanced test cannot be compared to previous test scores, why are these scores important?

- The scores on these tests are important because they identify a starting point to show how well students are progressing against the new, higher standards. It is important for parents to know that their child is mastering the necessary skills to be successful in the next grade level.

If a student was not familiar with computers, were accommodations made for technology, such as paper and pencil versions? Did students have enough time to finish?

- Students had opportunities to practice on computers in class, including taking Smarter Balanced practice and training tests. These activities gave students the opportunity to become familiar with the tools in the test, including calculators and highlighters, and the different types of questions, like creating a graph, typing answers in a box, dragging and dropping, drawing lines on a graph and creating equations with the equation editor.
- Paper tests are only available for schools that do not meet the technology requirement, and either lack computers or sufficient internet connections to support an online test. They are not an available

option based on student preference. Students with a disability who need a paper test must have it listed as an accommodation on an IEP or 504.

- The test has no time limit so students who might be less adept at using a computer will have the necessary time they need to finish their work.

Below are common questions and answers that may be useful as California educators communicate about the Smarter Balanced Assessment System with students, parents, the media, local school boards, and the general public. These are from the California Department of Education: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/sbcommonqa.asp>

CAASPP Communication FAQs About Smarter Balanced

Addresses common questions that are asked about the Smarter Balanced Assessments including how they were developed and what the tests measure.

The following common questions and answers may be useful as California educators communicate about the Smarter Balanced Assessment System with students, parents, the media, local school boards, and the general public.

Part of a Comprehensive Plan for Student Success

Knowing that public schools are preparing students for the challenges of the future, California has developed a comprehensive plan for high-quality teaching and learning in every school. We have a long way to go, but our work is well under way, with higher academic standards, more decision-making in the hands of schools and communities, and more resources dedicated to schools and to students with the greatest needs.

Gradually, we're providing more support for teachers, more resources for students and more access to technology. As a result, exciting changes have begun to take place inside our classrooms. Along with reading to follow a story, students are learning to read to cite evidence and draw logical conclusions. They are learning to use math to solve real-world problems rather than merely pick out the right multiple-choice answer.

The system-wide changes we have begun are focused on helping students succeed in the long run, achieving their dreams of college and a career. They will take considerable time and effort to carry out. That's why the course we've set in California is to carefully phase in change as state and local capacity grows.

What are the Smarter Balanced Assessments?

- The Smarter Balanced assessments are new computer based tests that measure student knowledge of California's English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics standards. These new assessments replace the former paper-based, multiple-choice assessments for students in grades three through eight and grade eleven. The first statewide administration of these assessments will take place in spring 2015.

Why are new assessments needed in California?

- California has adopted more rigorous academic standards that emphasize not only subject knowledge, but also the critical thinking, analytical writing, and problem-solving skills students need to be successful in college and career. These standards set a higher bar for California students to help ensure they are prepared to succeed in the future. Because what students need to know and be able to do has changed, our tests must change as well.
- California's new assessment system represents the next step in a comprehensive plan to promote high-quality teaching and learning and improve student outcomes. This plan recognizes that assessments can play an important role in promoting and modeling high-quality instruction.

How were these new assessments developed?

- California worked with 21 other states as part of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium to develop these new assessments, as well as the professional and instructional resources provided to help students, teachers and schools throughout the year.
- Educators – from K–12 to higher education – were deeply involved in the design, testing and scoring of these new assessments. California conducted both pilot and statewide field tests of Smarter Balanced assessments over the last two years.
- Last year, California suspended its use of existing assessments in ELA and Math to give teachers time to focus on refining instruction of California’s more rigorous standards, to give students time to begin deeper learning, and to give schools time to prepare to administer these computer-based tests effectively.

How are Smarter Balanced Assessments an improvement over previous statewide tests?

- The Smarter Balanced assessment system uses both computer-based and computer-adaptive tests, providing students with a wider range of questions tailored to more accurately identify the knowledge and skills individual students have mastered.
- The tests include performance tasks that challenge students to demonstrate critical thinking and problem-solving, and to apply their knowledge and skills to real-world problems.
- The tests measure standards that our K–12 and higher education systems all agree address appropriate expectations for the preparation of high school graduates who are ready for success.
- The tests are taken online, and results are available to teachers, schools and school districts much more quickly than results from previous tests.
- The new computer-based tests include supports for English learners and students with special needs, allowing these students the ability to effectively demonstrate their knowledge and skills.
- The new assessment system is designed to measure student growth over time, which was not possible in California’s previous system, and will provide teachers and schools important information to guide learning.

What will the Smarter Balanced tests measure?

- Smarter Balanced tests provide one measure of student knowledge of the subject matter, critical thinking, analytical writing, and problem solving skills they need to prepare for and succeed in today’s world.
- These assessments provide important information as to whether students are on track to pursue college and career by the time they graduate from high school. The tests provide timely and actionable student information so that teachers and schools can adjust and improve teaching to ensure students have the knowledge and skills they need to succeed in school and beyond.

What results can we expect from the Smarter Balanced Tests?

- The new tests are too fundamentally different from the old exams to make any reliable comparisons between old scores and new. This year’s results will establish a new baseline for the progress we expect students to make over time.
- Based on trial runs of the new assessments in California and other states, many if not most students will need to make significant progress to reach the standards set for math and literacy that accompany college and career readiness.
- Over time, as students experience multiple years of instruction related to the skills tested by the new assessments, California’s results will show improved achievement. (In 2002, California’s new Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) tests also set a new baseline for achievement and student results improved quickly over time.)
- Parents will receive a report of their child’s scores. But no student, parent or teacher should be discouraged by these scores, which will not be used to determine whether a student moves on to the next grade. Rather, the scores will represent an opportunity to focus on the needs of students and support teachers and schools in their work to achieve college and career readiness.

How will this system help improve teaching and learning?

- The Smarter Balanced assessments are an academic check-up, designed to give teachers the feedback they need to improve instruction. The tests measure critical thinking, analytical writing, problem solving, and subject area knowledge, providing teachers with multiple sources of actionable information about student strengths and areas where students need additional support.
- The system provides two types of interim assessments that teachers and schools can use to assess student learning at key points in the instructional year and to measure student preparedness for year-end summative tests. Both of these tests provide information for teachers to adjust and differentiate teaching in response to the results.
- The system provides a Digital Library of professional learning and instructional resources to help teachers assess individual student learning during instruction, provide feedback to students in a timely manner, and adjust teaching and learning as needed.