



California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Communication about Smarter Balanced

The following 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.

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.

A New Testing System Built to Help Teachers

Teachers want to know what students know so they can adjust instruction. Like class assignments and report cards, tests provide one more way to assess student progress. Because the things we want students to know and be able to do have changed, our tests must change as well.

This spring, students will take part in the first statewide administration of the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) for students in grades three through eight and grade eleven for the 2014–15 school year. These computer-based tests will replace the former paper-based, multiple-choice assessments in English language arts/literacy (ELA) and math.

The tests are an academic check-up, designed to give teachers feedback they need to improve instruction and the tools to improve teaching and learning. The assessments will use computer adaptive technology to provide more accurate information about individual student performance. And because the tests are taken online, information will

be available to teachers, schools and school districts on a timely basis so it can be used to help students learn.

Scores: Resetting the System

Like the new academic standards, the new tests are too fundamentally different from the old exams to make any reliable comparisons between old scores and new. In many cases, new textbooks and materials have only recently arrived at schools. That's why this year's test results will only establish a baseline for the progress we expect students to make over time.

Based on trial runs of some test questions in California and other states, many if not most students will need to make significant progress to reach the standards set for math and ELA that accompany college and career readiness.

No student, parent or teacher should be discouraged by scores, which will never be used to determine whether a student moves on to the next grade. Rather, the results will provide an opportunity to focus on the needs of students and support teachers and schools in their work.

Patience and Persistence

California's new assessment system represents the next step in our comprehensive plan to promote high-quality teaching and learning and improve student outcomes. This plan recognizes that assessments can play a role in promoting high-quality instruction.

Teachers in California support these changes because, unlike in other states, the primary purpose of testing here is to support learning, not to impose high-stakes consequences. This approach fits well with California's new system for funding our schools, which recognizes that decisions about education dollars are best made by parents, teachers and communities themselves.

In a state as diverse and complex as California, adjustments will always be needed to make lasting progress. Patience and persistence will be required to help our schools continue to succeed during this time of transition.