

Answering questions about Smarter Balanced

This Q & A is intended as a resource educators can use when visiting with parents about the upcoming Smarter Balanced Field Test.

Which students are taking the new Smarter Balanced assessment?

All public school students in grades 3-8 and 11, except for those who take the alternate assessment designed for students with the most severe cognitive disabilities.

Why is my child taking a new assessment this year?

South Dakota has adopted new content standards in the areas of English language arts and math. The new Smarter Balanced assessment is aligned to these new standards. Students who need to be assessed in science (grades 5, 8, 11) will still take the Dakota-STEP test for science, because the state's science standards have not changed.

I've heard I won't get to see my child's test scores. Why?

No student scores will be reported this year because this is a Field Test, which basically means it's a "practice run." The Field Test gives students a chance to see what will be expected of them on the new assessment, and it allows teachers and schools to practice administering the test, which is online for the first time. Smarter Balanced will use information from the Field Test to improve the assessment and ensure it is accurate and fair for all students when it's fully operational in the 2014-15 school year. Beginning with the Smarter Balanced test administered in spring 2015, parents will receive their student's results.

It is expected that challenges will arise during the Field Test. That's okay. Working together with teachers and school administrators, states in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium will address any issues identified prior to the launch of the fully operational assessment in the 2014-15 school year.

What will the assessment cover?

The test will cover the content areas of English language arts and math.

The ELA and math assessments each have two components:

- **Computer-adaptive assessment:** This is a set of questions in a variety of formats. On the Field Test, these questions will not yet be adaptive, meaning a student's response to one question will not affect the subsequent question he or she receives. Student responses on this year's Field Test will help in the development of adaptive questions for the fully operational test.

Beginning in 2015, these questions will be customized to each student based on answers to previous questions. In this way, the assessment can most accurately measure each student's knowledge and skills.

- **Performance tasks:** Students will participate in a brief classroom activity to introduce the topic of a performance task. Performance tasks are collections of questions and activities connected to a single theme or scenario. They are meant to measure depth of understanding, writing and research skills, and complex analysis, which cannot be adequately assessed with traditional test questions. The performance tasks will be taken on a computer (but will not be computer-adaptive) and will take one to two class periods to complete.

How long will the assessment take?

The tests are not timed, but it is estimated that the ELA assessment will take elementary students about 3 ½ hours and high school students about 4 hours to complete. The math assessment is estimated to take elementary students about 2 ½ hours and high school students about 3 ½ hours to complete.

Testing will occur in multiple sessions, so students will typically spend one to two hours per day on the assessments over the course of several days.

Can my child and I try a practice test?

Absolutely. You are encouraged to do so. Practice tests are available at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/practice-test/>.

What if I want to opt my child out of the assessment?

All public school districts are required to administer the statewide assessment to all students in the tested grades, and all those students are required to take the assessment (South Dakota Codified Law 13-3-55; Administrative Rule of South Dakota 24:55:07:01). The only exception is for some students who are limited English proficient (ARSD 24:55:07:11).

House Bill 1187, which would have allowed parents to opt their children out of the statewide assessment, failed in the legislature this year.

Does the test support English language learners, students with disabilities and other students with special needs?

Yes. The Smarter Balanced assessment will provide accurate measures of achievement for students with disabilities and English language learners. The assessments will address visual, auditory and physical access barriers—allowing virtually all students to demonstrate what they know and can do. For those students with the most severe cognitive disabilities, an alternate assessment is administered.

What happens with the test results?

This first year of the Smarter Balanced test, there will be no individual student results available. In future years, parents will receive notice of how their students performed on the assessment, just as they have in the past with the Dakota STEP. Appropriate people within the school district (eg., your child's classroom teacher) also have access to test results. Educators use this data to determine how they can improve instruction and learning in specific areas. Once a year, aggregate test data for schools and districts across the state are reported publicly via the Report Card published by the state Department of Education.