

Smarter Balanced: Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium?

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) is a team of states—including Oregon—working together voluntarily to develop K-12 assessments in English language arts/literacy and math called Smarter Balanced. These tests are aligned to the [Common Core State Standards \(CCSS\)](#) and accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness. The Consortium includes educators, researchers, policymakers, and community groups working to help all students thrive in a knowledge-driven global economy. Smarter Balanced members states educate more than 19 million students nationally.

2. How are teachers involved in creating the Smarter Balanced assessment system?

Smarter Balanced is committed to engaging teachers in the design of an assessment system that provides resources and information to improve teaching and learning. Teachers helped write and review assessment items and performance tasks for the Pilot Test of the assessment system in early 2013 and contributed to the development of items for the Field Test in early 2014. In addition, teams of teachers from each state have been and are helping evaluate various assessment tools and resources for the new Smarter Balanced assessment system. Over 250 educators in Oregon have participated in the development process—developing test questions, creating teaching resources, and helping set achievement levels for the new tests.

3. What are the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and how are they related to Smarter Balanced?

Developed by 48 states, two territories, and the District of Columbia, the [Common Core State Standards](#) offer schools, teachers, students, and parents clear, understandable, and consistent standards in English language arts and mathematics. The CCSS defines the knowledge and skills students should take away from their K-12 schooling to be successfully prepared for college and career opportunities. More than 40 states have adopted the Common Core State Standards. Oregon adopted the standards in 2010, and local schools and districts have been working hard to implement the standards in their classrooms.

Teachers and parents need information about whether students are meeting the expectations set by the CCSS. The Smarter Balanced assessment system measures mastery of the Common Core State Standards and will provide timely information about student achievement and progress toward college and career readiness. Educators will also have access to resources and tools that they can use in the classroom to address the individual needs of their students as we make this transition.

4. Does a shared assessment system require a shared or common curriculum?

No. Curriculum decisions are made by educators at the local level. Our Oregon schools and districts make local decisions about what our students are taught in the classroom. As a participating member of SBAC, Oregon will have access to professional development materials and instructional resources for teachers. These tools are optional and can be used, as needed, to complement local curriculum supports to districts and teachers.

5. How will Smarter Balanced assessments contribute to student success?

All students deserve an education that prepares them for their next steps in life—whether that’s going on to college or starting a career. Smarter Balanced is guided by the belief that a balanced, high-quality assessment system can improve teaching and learning by providing information and tools for teachers and schools to help students succeed. Timely and meaningful assessment data can offer specific information about areas of performance so that teachers can follow up with targeted instruction, students can better focus their own efforts, and administrators and policymakers can more fully understand what students know and can do, in order to guide curriculum and professional development decisions. Importantly, educators will be able to easily compare student achievement between schools, districts, and states to ensure that students are making progress.

6. How does Smarter Balanced compare to our previous Oregon statewide tests?

Similar to our previous state tests, Smarter Balanced assessments make use of computer adaptive technology, which is more precise and efficient in delivering accurate and timely information on student progress. Computer adaptive tests adjust to a student’s ability by basing the difficulty of future questions on previous answers, providing a more accurate measurement of student achievement, particularly for high and low-performing students. Unlike our previous state tests, Smarter Balanced assessments go beyond multiple-choice questions and include different types of questions that allow students to construct their own answers and better demonstrate their communication, analytical, and real-world problem solving skills.

7. What is a performance task?

Performance tasks challenge students to apply their knowledge and skills to respond to real-world problems. They can best be described as collections of questions and activities that are connected to a single theme or scenario. These activities are meant to measure capacities such as depth of understanding, research skills, and complex analysis, which cannot be adequately assessed with more traditional multiple choice questions.

Performance tasks in reading, writing, and math are part of the Smarter Balanced year-end assessment and can also be used by teachers to assess student progress throughout the school year. The performance tasks will be delivered by computer (but will not be computer adaptive) and will take one to two class periods to complete.

8. Do the Smarter Balanced assessments support English language learners, students with disabilities, and other students with special needs?

The Smarter Balanced assessment system will provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for students with disabilities and English language learners. The tests will address visual, auditory, and physical access barriers—allowing virtually all students to demonstrate what they know and can do. Additionally, the tests include multiple tools (e.g., digital notepad), supports (e.g., translated pop-up glossary), and accommodations (e.g., Braille, closed captioning) to adapt to every student’s distinct needs and learning styles.

For more information, download the [Accessibility and Accommodations](#) factsheet and visit the [Support for Under-Represented Students](#) page on the Smarter Balanced website at www.smarterbalanced.org. For a full list of universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations, download the *Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines*.