



# College and Career Ready: Common Core State Standards and Smarter Balanced Assessments

Portland Public Schools is focused on student success and preparing all students for college and career in a global economy. Academic standards help set the bar for success and testing measures how well students are meeting that bar.

## What to expect in 2014-15:

- **New teaching strategies to support new standards:** All schools are learning teaching strategies to support the Common Core State Standards in math and English-Language Arts, which PPS began implementing in 2011.
- **New tests:** This spring, PPS students in grades 3-8 and 11 will take new state math and English-Language Arts tests. The Smarter Balanced Assessments will replace the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills tests in these subject areas. (The science test will change when the new science standards are fully implemented.) (See flip side)

## Common Core State Standards

The Common Core State Standards (CCSS) lay out what students should know and be able to do at each grade level K-12 in English-Language Arts and mathematics. Oregon adopted the standards in 2010. PPS began implementing them in 2011-12.

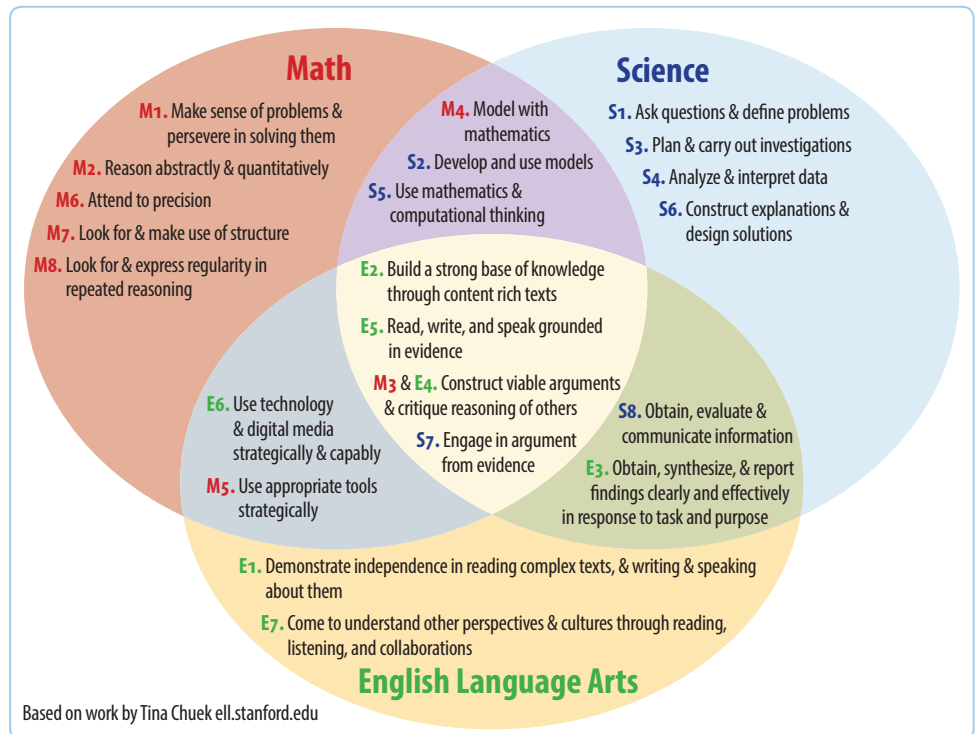
### How are these standards different?

Oregon has had academic standards for years. However, the previous standards did not adequately prepare our students for our rapidly changing economy and many students need remedial courses in college, relearning content they should have mastered in high school.

The new standards shift some content—such as certain algebraic concepts - to earlier grades so that students can be prepared for credit-bearing coursework in college. They also place greater emphasis on other content - such as non-fiction texts - to better reflect the skills needed in college and careers.

The Common Core also includes habits of mind of successful learners. These practices support critical thinking skills that apply to many areas of study, career and life situations.

(See diagram right)



### Do the standards tell teachers what to teach?

No. The Common Core Standards, for example, say that students should be able to analyze a text and use examples from the text to demonstrate comprehension. Portland Public Schools determines the learning materials that teachers will use and teachers also bring their expertise and creativity to engage their students.

### How can I support my student's progress in school?

Support your child to attend school and to complete assignments. If possible, check in with the student's teacher to see how your child is doing and what additional support may be needed. Parent/teacher conferences in October are an important opportunity to get an update on your child's progress. If a child is struggling, ask the teacher if there are other district programs or specialists who could help.

## Smarter Balanced Assessments

### Are there new state tests to go with the new standards?

Yes. PPS – and schools across Oregon – will shift this spring from the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) tests to the Smarter Balanced Assessments, designed to measure if students are learning the new standards. Students in grades 3-8 and 11 will take the new tests this spring in math and English-Language Arts. **Parents will receive more information closer to the time of the tests.**

### Are the new tests harder?

The Smarter Balanced tests may initially seem more difficult because the tests go beyond multiple-choice questions. The tests are more interactive and engaging - using short videos or written passages, for example, and posing open-ended questions to which students type in answers. Accommodations and appropriate supports are provided to students learning English and/or who have other special needs. Test scores will likely drop until students and teachers adjust to the new tests. However, the tests are an important tool for improving student achievement and helping schools prepare students for college and careers.

### How are the new tests scored?

Students either fail to meet, meet, or exceed the benchmark, as was done with the OAKS tests. Then as now, test developers invite the public - including educators and industry leaders - to weigh in on how high a student must score to “meet” and “exceed” the benchmarks.

### What happens if a student fails to meet the benchmark?

In grades 3-8, a student’s performance on the tests helps teachers and parents know the areas where a student needs to focus and whether the student is on track to meet the Essential Skills the state requires for graduation once they get to high school. Taking the tests in the lower grades familiarizes students with the tests. When they reach high school, they are then able to take the state test to show what they’ve learned and earn their high school diploma.

Test results also help state and federal officials determine if schools and school districts are meeting the learning needs of all students. This is one reason why it’s important for all students to take the tests. The state docks the overall rank of a school if fewer than 95 percent of students take the tests at each grade they are offered.



## Resources and links

- **PPS Common Core webpage:** [www.pps.net](http://www.pps.net) ; search “Common Core.”View links to:
  - › The standards themselves.
  - › Parent toolkits in English and Spanish.
  - › Debunking myths about the Common Core.
- **Smarter Balanced:**
  - › **Learn more:** [www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments)
- **Examples of test questions:**
  - › [www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks)
- **What students say:** PPS 3rd and 4th graders who took the Smarter Balanced Field Test last spring shared their experience:

“It was fun; we had to read different sources and create an essay.”

“I like typing instead of filling in bubbles.”

“It was longer and we had to work harder. It makes you smarter when you work harder.”

“New test is better because we have to type, not just fill in bubbles.”

“Teachers need to teach typing skills and kids need to practice typing.”

