



Smarter Balanced Assessments coming this spring

Winter/Spring 2015

This spring, the Oregon Department of Education is rolling out a new test in school districts across the state called **Smarter Balanced**. The new test is designed to measure how well they are mastering new academic standards.

Oregon adopted the new academic standards, called **Common Core State Standards**, in 2010 to better prepare students for college and career. These standards, adopted by dozens of states across the country, reflect what students need to know and be able to do to be competitive in a global economy and are more rigorous than the standards we had in the past.

Who, what, when and where:

- **Who:** Students in grades 3-8 and 11 will take the Smarter Balanced tests in math and English language arts (reading, writing). These tests will replace the Oregon Assessment of Knowledge and Skills (OAKS) tests in these subject areas.
- **Why:** The new tests measure how much students are learning and where support is needed. Most 11th graders use the tests to meet graduation requirements.
- **When:** Each school sets the specific test dates within these time frames:
 - » **3-8th graders:** March 10 - June 5.
 - » **11th graders:** April 22 - June 5.
- **What:** Instead of only multiple-choice questions, the new tests also use audio clips and illustrations that help students apply their knowledge and critical thinking skills to real-world situations.
- **Test length:** On average, students take 3.5 hours to complete each test. They do not take the tests in one sitting. They only take the test once.
- **What if a student “fails” the test:** Students meet, exceed or do not meet the state benchmark on each test.
 - » **Grades 3-8:** The test results are *NOT* used to “hold students back.” The results help show where more support, resources or teacher training is needed.
 - » **Grade 11:** Most 11th graders use the test to show that they have mastered the subjects that the state requires for graduation. Students do this by earning a passing score on each test. The state may adjust the passing score to give students and schools time to adjust to the new tests. This passing score **may be lower** than the score required to “meet” the benchmark. If students do not earn a passing score, they must use an alternate method, such as work samples, to demonstrate their knowledge in order to graduate.
- **Students with special needs:** The test is given in English, which was also the case with the OAKS tests. The test includes supports for students who are learning English and/or have an Individualized Education Plan (IEP). Supports include such tools as a translated glossary for English language learners, a scratch pad, Braille and closed captioning. Teachers determine which tools students need. Learn more: www.smarterbalanced.org

Every student should know how to:

- Reason
- Analyze
- Listen
- Collaborate
- Read, Write, Speak
- Compute
- Use Technology
- Design Solutions

These skills—and many others—are a part of the Common Core Standards and are the “competencies” that the Smarter Balanced test measures.

How can I support my student to do their best on the test?

- Take a practice test with your student: <http://sbac.portal.airast.org/practice-test>
- View sample questions: www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks
- Make sure a student is rested and has had enough to eat on test day.
- Concerned about your child's preparedness for testing? Talk with the teacher or principal.

Can students choose not to take the tests?

- **Exemptions:** State law allows for parents to exempt students from the tests for: disability or religious reasons.
- **Request:** The parent or guardian must fill out an exemption form in the school office.
- **Learning activity:** The parent is also asked to propose a learning activity that the child can complete instead of taking the test, such as a special project that covers math and/or reading skills that would be assessed in the tests.

Learn more: www.pps.net, search “Common Core.”

For more information about the Smarter Balanced Tests, please contact:

- Your school principal, for school-level questions.
- PPS Research & Evaluation Department at rne@pps.net, with questions about the test.
- PPS Community Involvement & Public Affairs at pubinfo@pps.net, 503-916-3304, if you wish to share your views with PPS.
- Oregon Department of Education at meg.koch@ode.state.or.us, if you wish to share your views with the state.