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## What is the new Smarter Balanced Assessment all about?

### A new scoring system

Smarter Balanced scores will fall into one of four levels. Students scoring a 4 are on track for college and may even be able to save money by enrolling in dual credit courses in 11th and 12th grade, earning college credit while still in high school. Students who score a 3 are also on target to be college- and career-ready by the end of 12th grade.

A score of a 1 or 2 means that the student should be challenged and supported to progress faster in order to have more options after graduation. Students and their parents can use the Smarter Balanced scores to help plan their path through school.

New Hampshire children have taken the annual NECAP – the New England Common Assessment Program – assessment each fall for years. The Smarter Balanced Assessment replaces the NECAP and is a big step forward. Here is some background.

*Higher academic standards and Smarter Balanced Assessments prepare students for college and career*

Today students are preparing to enter a globally competitive world requiring more skills and knowledge than ever before. New Hampshire schools have adopted new math and English standards that set higher goals for what our students should know and be able to do. The new standards will give our students and their parents greater confidence and competence as they prepare for college, career and life after high school.

The new math standards move beyond memorization to focus on gaining understanding of key concepts while learning the standard mathematical procedures like multiplying large numbers or dividing one fraction into another. Students will now be challenged to explain the thinking behind their answers and establish a strong foundation before moving to the next level.

Higher English Language Arts standards build more demanding goals for students' reading, writing and all forms of self-expression. Students now read more complex nonfiction and literature and get more opportunities to practice writing and speaking using research and evidence.

State and federal law require all schools to give an annual assessment to students in grades 3-8 and once in high school. Starting this year, New Hampshire is using Smarter Balanced for that required annual assessment. But Smarter Balanced is actually a high-quality system of assessments that teachers can use throughout the year to better understand what their students really need. Smarter Balanced Assessments are better at measuring what students really know and can do because they require students to apply the math, reading and writing concepts they are learning to real world problems.

Parents can have confidence that the new assessments will help them understand where their children are on the pathway to college, career and whatever creative challenges they may choose.

**“Smarter Balanced will become an important part of how we help children progress in our classrooms. The new test will be an important addition to the rich information we gather about student learning.”**

*Ellen Hume-Howard, District Director of Curriculum  
Sanborn Regional School District*

The Smarter Balanced Assessments will be more challenging and the scores will probably be lower

Our schools are now setting higher expectations. So at first fewer students will get high scores on the test. But lower scores do not mean that students have learned less or fallen behind academically. The new scores should not be compared to NECAP because the standards are higher and the assessment is new. Once we receive the results, we will set a new baseline from which to measure future student achievement growth over time.

It's not an apples-to-apples comparison. It's a new baseline from which to measure future growth over time.



The new assessments are a step forward

Where the NECAP measured basic knowledge, the Smarter Balanced Assessment asks students to demonstrate an array of research, writing and problem-solving skills. Students get to apply their knowledge to real-world problems.

There will be more challenging multi-part math problems to solve. And there will be a new kind of question - a "performance task" – that is really a collection of questions and activities with a single theme. Performance tasks measure complex analysis and other skills cannot be assessed with traditional test questions.

Good accommodations for English Language Learners and students with disabilities

Smarter Balanced Assessments feature the most complete accessibility accommodations we have ever been able to offer in the annual statewide test. Students have access to tools like Braille, closed captioning, and videos of American Sign Language interpreters to help overcome disabilities, while enabling them to take tests at the same time as others. English language learners will be able to use glossaries and demonstrate knowledge regardless of their level of proficiency in English. Students with severe cognitive disabilities can still participate in an alternate assessment.

There are many practical benefits to the new assessment. One is that we will administer Smarter Balanced in the spring and, since it is administered online, we will get the results back quickly.

Smarter Balanced is "computer-adaptive," so the difficulty of the questions is automatically adjusted as the student proceeds. Teachers and parents will get a better sense of how a student is progressing.

And the new test will take somewhat less time than the NECAP for students to complete. In addition, it can be spread over multiple sessions, so students might take the test for an hour or two each day over several days.

## FURTHER RESOURCES

New Hampshire's College and Career Ready Standards:  
<http://www.education.nh.gov/instruction/curriculum/>

Smarter Balanced: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org>

Practice Test: <http://sbac.portal.airast.org/practice-test/>

Frequently Asked Questions:  
<http://www.education.nh.gov/spotlight/ccss/sbac.htm>

Privacy and Security of Student Data:  
[http://www.education.nh.gov/spotlight/ccss/documents/faq\\_privacy.pdf](http://www.education.nh.gov/spotlight/ccss/documents/faq_privacy.pdf)