

## Frequently Asked Questions: Smarter Balanced assessment

### What is the Smarter Balanced assessment?

Smarter Balanced is South Dakota's new state assessment, to be administered for the first time in spring 2015. It will be administered to students in grades 3-8 and 11 and measures student mastery of new, more rigorous standards in English language arts and math. The test was developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, a group of 22 states, including South Dakota. More than 100 South Dakota educators served on Smarter Balanced work groups as the test was being developed.

### Why is there a new assessment this year?

New standards and assessments are part of South Dakota's plan to help all students graduate high school ready for college, career, and life. The Smarter Balanced assessment is an important part of implementing these new standards in math and English language arts, because it will help educators and parents see if students are on track to meet the standards.

### Didn't students already take the Smarter Balanced assessment last year?

The Smarter Balanced Field Test was administered in spring 2014. It was a practice run to give districts, schools and teachers a chance to practice test administration procedures, and students the opportunity to experience what will be expected of them on the new assessment. Since the field test, a number of South Dakota educators have served on panels to help set achievement levels for the new test.

### What is achievement level setting?

Achievement level setting is the process for establishing one or more cut scores on an assessment, making it possible to create categories of performance.

Student scores on the Smarter Balanced assessment will fall within one of four achievement levels (1, 2, 3, 4). Smarter Balanced scores in higher ranges (Levels 3 and 4) demonstrate not only more thorough understanding of the standards, but the ability to apply knowledge. Scoring at these levels indicates students are on track to be college and career ready.

### Why is this assessment important?

Like an annual medical check-up, this test will provide an annual academic check-up, letting educators and parents read the "vital signs" indicating whether students are on track for academic success.

### I've heard student scores are likely to go down. Is that true?

Because the new assessment measures student mastery of new, more rigorous standards, student performance on Smarter Balanced should not be compared to performance on Dakota STEP, the former state assessment. Any time a new test is introduced, there will be a period of adjustment as students become familiar with the new concepts being assessed.

If you must compare results of the two tests, expect to see a drop in the number of students demonstrating proficiency (Levels 3 and 4). This should not be cause for alarm; it means we are challenging students and preparing them for the rigors of postsecondary education and careers in today's world.

### Is this assessment an improvement over the previous state assessment?

Yes. This new assessment requires students to apply knowledge. There is more to it than multiple choice and filling in bubbles. Writing is required at every grade level. New question types and performance tasks ask students to demonstrate an array of research, writing and problem solving skills. This means assessment results will provide a more meaningful picture of student performance.

The test is administered online rather than in a paper and pencil format. Today's students are very comfortable in this online environment. In addition, accessibility tools are available for all students, and accommodations—such as Braille—are available for those who need them.

### Where can I take a practice test?

Practice tests are available at <http://commoncore.sd.gov/assessment.aspx>.