



### **What is Smarter Assessment?**

Smarter Assessment is the online assessment system that replaces the Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System (DCAS) with Smarter English Language Arts/Literacy and Smarter Mathematics Assessments for grades 3 to 8. It was developed specifically to help teachers and parents see how well students are mastering Delaware’s new higher standards and where they need help in preparing for future success in college and careers to help students get *Ready for the Real World*.

### **Why was new testing necessary?**

To help all students graduate from high school more prepared for college and careers, Delaware has been a leader in raising its academic standards. Delaware teachers have been implementing these standards – the Common Core State Standards – for the last few years. The Smarter test was developed to measure the new standards and to provide teachers with powerful new tools and resources to support student progress throughout the year.

### **Who created the new assessments?**

Working with the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, educators from around the country, including Delaware teachers, participated in creating the assessments, writing questions, and reviewing the tests for content, bias/sensitivity, and accessibility.

### **How is Smarter Assessment better than DCAS?**

Smarter Assessment offers significant improvements over previous testing. It replaces the traditional multiple choice format with open-ended questions that require students to write short answers, explain their thinking and solve problems in very different ways. For English Language Arts (ELA), students are asked to read more complex fiction and non-fiction texts across all subjects, not just English. They will use evidence from the text to answer questions, make inferences and write essays. In mathematics, students will be performing more multi-step problems with application to real-world situations, and will have to explain how they achieved their answers.

### **What are computer adaptive assessments? What are performance tasks?**

The Smarter English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics Assessments each have two components: computer-adaptive assessments and performance tasks. Computer-adaptive testing essentially “customizes” the test for each student by adjusting the level of difficulty based on how well the student is answering the questions. This method provides a more accurate measurement of achievement, particularly for high- and low-performing students. Performance tasks are collections of questions and activities that are connected to a single theme or scenario. They are meant to measure depth of understanding, writing and research skills, and complex analysis.

### **How does Smarter Assessment help improve student performance?**

With innovative, new question types and computer-adaptive testing, Smarter Assessment provides students with a more engaging test experience, and one that produces more meaningful, accurate results. Through Smarter Analytics in IMS, teachers are provided deep levels of sortable data for use individually and in PLCs. This data gives Delaware educators insight into each student's college and career readiness early enough to address issues and provide extra support where needed.

### **What tools and resources does Smarter Assessment make available to teachers?**

Smarter Assessment is more than a year-end test. It is a complete system that provides the data, tools and resources teachers need to support improvements in student learning throughout the year. This includes a *Digital Library* of online resources, optional interim assessments and optional interim assessment blocks.

### **What is the Digital Library?**

The *Digital Library* is an online repository of more than 2,600 instructional and professional learning resources developed by teachers to assist with assessing students' progress and adjusting instruction when needed. Spanning K–12 and aligned to the Common Core Standards, the resources will help you implement effective, aligned practices that are recommended by your peers. Teachers can collaborate and interact, rating materials and sharing classroom experiences through online discussions. The *Digital Library* is available for your use now. If you do not already have access, you may request it through your district.

### **What are the optional interim assessments?**

Optional interim assessments are available for teachers to check in on student progress throughout the year and adjust instruction as needed. The full *Interim Comprehensive Assessment* mirrors the year-end assessment and gives students the opportunity to experience the full test. *Interim Assessment Blocks* can be used to check on students' understanding of small sets of related standards.

### **When do the new assessments begin?**

Unlike our previous testing, which was given as many as three times each year, the new assessments will be given just once a year in the spring, between March and June for grades 3 to 8. Testing dates will be determined by each school.

### **How is the test administered and how long does it take?**

The new assessments will be taken online and completed over the course of a few days in 1- to 2-hour sessions. This will minimize the demands on your classroom time and ensure that students remain alert and engaged. The tests are not timed, and students can take breaks. We estimate that for elementary school students, the English Language Arts (ELA) assessment will take 3.5 hours and the mathematics assessment will take 2.5 hours.

### **Isn't there too much time spent on testing in Delaware?**

Governor Jack Markell recently announced that the state would provide each school district and charter school with the resources they need to “audit” their current testing practices to identify any tests that can be eliminated. Over the past two years the state has eliminated several state tests—including end-of-course exams in Algebra I, Integrated Mathematics, Biology and Reading—and will continue to evaluate to ensure that all tests are useful and necessary. The time devoted to the Smarter English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics Assessments amounts to less than 1 percent of the time students are in school.

### **How can teachers help parents understand the anticipated lower scores?**

It's important for parents to understand that because students are being assessed by more challenging academic standards than before, fewer will likely meet the new standards in the beginning. This is expected and no reflection of their child's ability or the performance of our teachers or schools. We are holding our students to higher standards now, such as whether they are developing critical thinking and problem-solving skills. We have no doubt scores will rise as students receive more instruction aligned with the new standards.

### **Will the lower scores be a reflection on teachers?**

No. Our first year of testing will simply establish a new baseline showing where our students are currently positioned. The goal of Smarter Assessments is to help you see how well your students are mastering the new standards and how you can fine-tune your instruction to help them achieve our higher expectations.

### **Do the new assessments accommodate students with special needs?**

Yes. To allow all students, including those with disabilities and English language learners, to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, the new assessment system offers the most complete suite of accessibility tools and accommodation resources ever included in a K–12 assessment. Resources such as Braille and closed captioning address visual, auditory, and physical access barriers, and embedded glossaries in 10 languages and 4 dialects address language barriers. Teachers who work with English language learners and students with disabilities were included in the development of Smarter Assessments to make sure that every child has the chance to show what he or she knows. For students with the most significant intellectual disabilities, an alternate assessment is also available.

### **When will the assessments results be delivered?**

The portions of the tests that call for written responses will be hand-scored individually by people who have expertise in the subject matter and are trained to judge them objectively. That takes longer so parents will not receive their children's results until July. The parent report comprises several scores: an overall composite score for English Language Arts (ELA) and mathematics, results for particular topics such as reading and writing, and an “achievement level” for each subject. Students who achieve a level of 3 or 4 appear to be making appropriate progress toward college and career readiness.

Statewide scores will be released in August.

### **How can teachers encourage participation from parents who want to refuse to allow their children to be tested?**

Teachers can share with parents the many benefits of having their child participate in the assessments, including obtaining meaningful data on their child's progress toward college and career readiness. With so many good reasons to participate, we strongly urge parents to support the Smarter Assessment initiative.

### **How will student privacy be protected?**

The State of Delaware retains control of all student information, including assessment results. The assessment results will be used only to adjust and improve instruction so that students can master the knowledge and skills necessary for college and career readiness. Any reporting that occurs at the national level will only reflect state-level data and will not contain any individual student information. This is not any different from what we have done in previous years.

### **How will the new assessments affect teachers not directly involved in the testing?**

While not every student will take Smarter Assessments, all teachers and support personnel must be well-informed on why the new testing was developed and how it will help students better prepare for college and careers. Having all school representatives able to address student and parent questions will contribute significantly to ensuring clear communications.

### **Where can teachers take a practice test?**

Teachers are encouraged to take a practice test at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/practice-test>.