

Smarter Balanced



Delaware uses Smarter Balanced tests to assess math and English language arts, which includes reading and writing, in grades 3 – 8. These tests are designed to assess what skills students have and what they need to work on. Unfortunately, there has been a significant amount of misinformation spread regarding this test and it is important to focus on the facts.

Myth: The Smarter Balanced tests in grades 3 – 8 don't matter.

FACT: These new tests offer educators a fair and equitable measure of student progress. If students don't test, we won't see gaps between groups of students or have a full picture of how all of our students are doing. And students who need help the most may not get it.

Myth: Smarter Balanced test does NOT measure growth of students

FACT: No test alone measures a student's growth. However growth methodologies can be used to compute growth from one point in time to another point in time using assessment data. Smarter Assessment data will enable us to calculate growth from Spring to Spring. Because the test is based on a vertical scale and standards-based we will get more accurate results of how a student has grown over a full year. Many psychometricians have found that spring to spring growth models are most reliable and valid at predicting performance and student learning than a fall to spring model.

Myth: The Smarter Balanced tests questions are secret, are not proven to measure what they should, and/or cannot be trusted.

FACT: Last spring the Smarter Balanced assessment was administered to over 4 million students throughout the country. This data was used to test that the assessment questions accurately measured what students know and that the technology worked as intended. Prior to that the SBAC released full length Practice and Training Tests, for a full year prior there were Sample Items and Performance Tasks posted on the website and that same year small groups of students, including some here in Delaware participated in smaller pilot tests of small samples of questions. SBAC used what it learned from these field tests and pilots to improve the actual test before it went live this school year.

Myth: The tests take longer than the prior assessments and cost more per student

FACT: Last year the average 4th grade student spent 9 hours on DCAS ELA and Math testing during the school year, this year that same 4th grader spent on average only 7 hours on Smarter Balanced ELA and Math testing. In all grades 3 – 8,

a student will spend less time taking required state testing for Smarter Balanced than the requirements they had previously for DCAS. The Per pupil cost is approximately \$27.30, this is significantly lower than the prior cost per student for DCAS ELA and Math and this includes access for teachers to the full suite of formative, interim, and summative assessment items.

Myth: These tests are neither “valid” or “reliable”

FACT: Tests alone are not “valid” or “invalid.”

Validity refers to conclusions drawn from test results and can be done at any time once actual tests results are collected and frequently are done over time to review the data collected and interpretations of the scores. Smarter Balanced tests were constructed following established standards and engaged the work of educators from across the country, including representatives from Delaware in the development, review, and analysis of test items. Initial validity reviews were completed following the field test of over 4 million student tests and will be revisited as additional data is collected over time.

Myth: Data from Smarter Balanced tests do not help educators or directly benefit instruction because they arrive in the summer after school is over

FACT: Smarter Balanced test data provide teachers not only with important information about how students performed on grade level standards but also identifies existing strengths and weaknesses of incoming students to their classrooms. This enables teachers to appropriately evaluate their curriculum and work together in their schools to ensure students’ needs are met. Smarter Balanced tests require students to think critically, solve multi-step problems, write extensively, and explain their thinking. This gives educators information that

can be used to develop creative lessons and identify effective instructional approaches. Additionally, the Smarter Balanced Digital Library includes videos, exemplar units, and teacher submitted resources to further aid educators’ strategies and instructional practices.

Myth: Smarter Balanced Assessments put Students with Disabilities and English Language Learners (ELL) at a disadvantage

FACT: Smarter Balanced tests have more built in tools and supports than our prior DCAS assessment. In addition to providing students with their IEP accommodations, Smarter Balanced tests include “Universal Tools” such as English Dictionary, Glossary, keyboard navigation, writing tools, and zoom. The test also includes “Designated Supports” like color contrast, text-to-speech, test translations for ELL, assistance for vision impairments, embedded accommodations for American Sign Language and Braille, in addition to a commitment to work with states to build in additional supports and resources.

Myth: Our students are not ready, nor are our schools for the technology requirements of the Smarter Balanced tests.

FACT: Delaware has used computer based adaptive assessments since 2009 and the platform used to administer the Smarter Balanced test is familiar to our educators because it is the same vendor that we used to administer DCAS. While we anticipate some technological issues as any new implementation might encounter, the technological requirements outlined by SBAC for bandwidth and device capacity were more than met for Delaware schools.