

March 12th 2015

Superintendent's Message ~ March 2015

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Dear Parents,

Below is an **EXCELLENT** article by my good friend, **Rick Phelan** - who is the Program Director for Technology in Learning at the Sonoma County Office of Education. Also, in this newsletter are reports on **GOOD Things Happening at Bodega Bay school and Inverness School**

Smarter Balanced Assessments – Spring 2015

This year, California public schools are moving to new end-of-year assessments in English and mathematics, known as the Smarter Balanced Assessments. These assessments are focused on the Common Core State Standards and will be administered through a computerized testing system. In Spring 2015, the state will report student achievement scores and aggregated school reports from the new assessment system. This blog post provides information about the assessments that would be appropriate for sharing with parents and other members of a school community with a goal of helping them understand the new assessment system.

Important Points

These are computer-based assessments

Students in grades 3-8 and 11 will use computers or tablets to take the state assessments. Along with traditional multiple-choice responses, there are at least six other questions types, including constructed written responses. Computer testing with these types of response options are new for many students.

Test scores will be reported this spring

This is first year that public schools are being held accountable for fully implementing the Common Core Standards in English and mathematics—and the first time that scores from tests aligned to those standards will be reported. Over the past few years, educators have been working to develop knowledge, skills, and new teaching repertoires to support the standards.

Thinking will be measured in four domains

The new state assessment encourages thinking in four domains: 1) Recall and basic comprehension, 2) Application of concepts involving some mental processing, 3) Applications requiring more abstract thinking/reasoning and more complex inferences, and 4) Extended analysis that requires synthesis and analysis across multiple contexts and non-routine applications

Questions that require abstract thinking, synthesis, and analysis will comprise 50-60% of the new state assessments. This is a dramatic increase in rigor over past state assessments. In short, we are expecting students to think and process information differently than in the past.

Proficiency levels are set high

California has set high proficiency levels on the new state assessments. Joseph Willhoft, one of the test project directors, says that “because the new content standards set higher expectations for students and the new tests are designed to assess student performance against these higher expectations, the bar has been raised.”

Based on projections from the 2014 Smarter Balanced field tests conducted in California and 21 other states, it is likely that fewer students will score at the higher achievement levels on the new assessments, especially in the first few years. However, a drop in test scores doesn't mean students are sliding backwards or learning less. Rather, it gives us a more accurate measure of where students are on the path to success based on expectations that are designed to prepare them to compete nationally and globally. Educators and parents should see the results as a new start.

Results can't be compared to earlier state assessments

Assessment experts urge discretion when comparing performance on the new assessments with past California Standards Tests because the new assessments are measuring different content and skills. Deborah V.H. Sigman, Rocklin Unified School District deputy superintendent and a member of the executive committee for the new assessments, defended the new higher standards when she said, “We have an opportunity to change what assessment means inside our classrooms, an opportunity to make it really be about improving teaching and learning.”

State assessments are just one measure

Parents, teachers, and schools will receive reports from the new tests in late spring, with student

data reported in two significant ways. In order to comply with the federally required No Child Left Behind Act, California is required to provide both scale score results and achievement levels for students. These results should be looked at in context with other metrics—including local district assessments, report card grades, and portfolios of student work—to determine how well students are learning.

Test Construction & Reporting

With the Common Core Standards for English-language arts and mathematics, learning activities are organized and sequenced from grade to grade to build understanding for students. Success with standards at each grade level ensures that students are ready for the next grade, ultimately leading to readiness for college and careers. Smarter Balanced assessments are one tool that schools can use to gauge student learning relative to the Common Core Standards.

Each question on the new assessments is focused on one or more claims related to a student's understanding of English language arts or mathematics.

English Language Arts Claims

- **Claim 1, Reading**
Students can read closely and analytically to comprehend a range of increasingly complex literary and informational texts.
- **Claim 2, Writing**
Students can produce effective and well-grounded writing for a range of purposes and audiences.
- **Claim 3, Speaking and Listening**
Students can employ effective speaking and listening skills for a range of purposes and audiences.
- **Claim 4, Research/Inquiry**
Students can engage in research and inquiry to investigate topics, and to analyze, integrate, and present information.

Mathematics Claims

- **Claim 1, Concepts and Procedures**
Students can explain and apply mathematical concepts and interpret and carry out mathematical procedures with precision and fluency.
- **Claim 2, Problem Solving**
Students can solve a range of complex well-posed problems in pure and applied mathematics, making productive use of knowledge and problem solving strategies.
- **Claim 3, Communicating Reasoning**
Students can clearly and precisely construct viable arguments to support their own reasoning and to critique the reasoning of others.

- Claim 4, Modeling and Data Analysis
Students can analyze complex, real-world scenarios and can construct and use mathematical models to interpret and solve problems.
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Performance Relative to the Claims

Reports for teachers and parents will contain information on student performance relative to each of the English language arts and mathematics claims. Student performance will be reported as:

- Below standard
- At or near standard
- Above standard

Overall Score Reports

In addition, the reports will provide an overall score for student progress in English Language Arts and mathematics. This overall score will indicate the student’s level of understanding in each content area.

- Level 1, Student demonstrates minimal understanding
- Level 2, Student demonstrates partial understanding
- Level 3, Student demonstrates adequate understanding
- Level 4, Student demonstrates thorough understanding

Test officials encourage examination of these metrics in combination with other student performance information such as progress reports, local curriculum-based measures, and portfolios. Tony Alpert, an official from the Smarter Balance Assessment Consortium, says that “...instructional decisions should not be exclusively based on end-of-year Smarter Balanced Consortium tests.”

Communication Resources

National PTA resources

[Assessment and Common Core Video](#)
[Moving Beyond the Bubble, Assessment Factsheet \(pdf\)](#)

Parent notification letters

CDE provides a parent notification letter in [English \(doc\)](#) and [Spanish \(doc\)](#). The letters can be adapted by using school letterhead and inserting needed information where bold type appears.

Presentations for parents and community groups

SCOE data and assessment staff are available to provide presentations for school groups. Contact Rick Phelan at rphelan@scoe.org for information.

Reporting system overview

This [six-page guide \(pdf\)](#) provides a visual overview of the reports, which will be accessed

online. It shows how individual student, grade, school, district, and state reports will be displayed.

Sample article for school/district newsletter

This [sample article \(doc\)](#) can be customized reproduced in school newsletters. It is available in English and Spanish.

Sample parent letters

This [sample parent letter \(doc\)](#) from Calistoga Joint Unified School District can be customized and reproduced in English and Spanish.

The Oak Grove School District in San Jose provides another [sample parent letter \(doc\)](#) that highlights important information about SBAC testing.

SBAC Talking Points PowerPoint

The short [PowerPoint Presentation](#) highlights important points for discussion with parents and other stakeholders.