Smarter Balanced Assessments:
What Do the Scores Mean and Next Steps

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Smarter Balanced assessments, which are maintained and enhanced through a collaboration among 13 members, measure students' performance on college- and career-aligned content standards. The Smarter Balanced assessments are more comprehensive than many state and national tests. Smarter Balanced assessments evaluate higher-order skills through performance tasks: the English language arts/literacy assessment measures not only reading, but also listening, writing, and research; the mathematics assessment measures students' ability to engage in the operations of mathematics as well as how well students can use mathematics to analyze, solve problems and communicate their reasoning.

Test Components

The Smarter Balanced tests consist of a computer-adaptive assessment and a performance task. The computer-adaptive portion of the assessment provides more precision by customizing the test for each student by selecting items that match the student's performance. Using this approach, the system can use students' time more efficiently and provide more precise data with a shorter test. The performance task allows students to apply their higher-order thinking skills by evaluating information and developing and communicating a solution to a real-world problem.

Test Scores

The Smarter Balanced assessments are not Pass/Fail. Each item on the test is associated with a scale score that, in part, describes its relative difficulty along a continuum of student performance. A student's test is scored based on the student's unique performance pattern in terms of both the number and difficulty of questions answered correctly.

Reporting Test Scores

The Smarter Balanced tests report overall student performance in each subject area, as well as more specific information regarding performance in Reading, Writing, Listening, and Research for ELA, and Operations and Procedures, Problem Solving, Communicating Reasoning, and Modeling and Data Analysis for mathematics.

What Knowledge and Skills Did Students Demonstrate?

Students' overall performance in each subject area is categorized into one of four performance levels, which describe the relative accuracy and complexity of students' performance within their grade level. Families and students can use results to support conversations with students' teachers about opportunities for their students to benefit from additional support. Policymakers can use Smarter Balanced assessment results to help describe statewide student performance and to help focus state resources to best impact student outcomes. Educators can use results, along with information from interim assessments, as additional information to help identify performance patterns among their students and to inform decisions about curriculum investments and district supports.

Suggestions for Additional Learning

Interpreting results from large-scale assessments can be complex. The results of the assessments can be described in two ways: 1) what knowledge and skills did students demonstrate on the assessment and 2) what are some next steps that might help the student learn more.

The table below provides a description and suggested actions for each achievement level that educators and students might take to accelerate learning.

Achievement Level	Description	Suggested Next Steps
Level 4	Students consistently demonstrate advanced grade-level knowledge and skills with deep understanding and a full range of complexity.	Engaging in activities like challenging projects and problem-solving tasks that encourage creative thinking and deeper application of their knowledge and skills
Level 3	Students consistently demonstrate proficient grade-level knowledge and skills with a broad range of complexity.	Opportunities that build on their strengths, such as enrichment activities, while also receiving additional support in areas where they are still developing
Level 2	Students demonstrate foundational grade-level knowledge and skills with a limited range of complexity.	The identification of their strengths and areas for growth, along with tailored instructional support to help them make meaningful progress
Level 1	Students do not consistently demonstrate grade-level knowledge and skills.	Focused time and personalized supports to strengthen essential grade-level skills and accelerate their learning journey

Grade-level performance with increasing accuracy and complexity