

New Hampshire's Statewide Assessment: Smarter Balanced Frequently Asked Questions for Parents

Why is my child taking a new assessment this year?

- New Hampshire is replacing its existing NECAP tests with an assessment that more closely measures a **student's understanding** of academic content and skills in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics.
- The new assessment is called Smarter Balanced and it provides an **academic checkup** for students by measuring real-world skills like analytical reading, persuasive writing and problem solving.
- The new assessment is given online and will provide a better picture of **where students are succeeding and where they need help** as compared to previous statewide assessments.
- Parents can access complete **Practice Tests** in ELA and mathematics for grades 3 through 8 and 11 at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/practice-test/>.

How long will the assessments take?

- The Smarter Balanced Assessments are not timed, but it is estimated that the English language arts/literacy assessment will take 4 (for elementary students) to 4 ½ hours (for high school students) and the math assessment will take 3 hours (for elementary students) to 4 hours (for high school students). In addition, students will have a brief classroom activity to introduce the topic of the performance task. Testing will occur in multiple sessions, so students will typically spend 1 to 2 hours per day on the assessments over a few days.
- The English language arts/literacy and mathematics assessments each have two components:
 - Computer-adaptive assessments: A set of assessment questions in a variety of formats that will be **customized to each student** based on answers to previous questions. In this way, the assessments can most accurately **measure each student's knowledge and skills**.
 - Performance tasks: Collections of questions and activities that are coherently connected to a single theme or scenario. These activities are meant to measure capacities such as **depth of understanding, writing and research skills, and complex analysis**, which cannot be adequately assessed with traditional test questions. The performance tasks will be taken on a computer (but will not be computer-adaptive) and will take one to two class periods to complete.



Will I notice a difference in my student's test scores this year from when they took the old NECAP?

- That is possible, but not a certainty. It is important to keep in mind:
 - Lower test scores do not mean that students have learned less or fallen behind academically.
 - When the bar is raised, as it has been in many school districts, more is expected in order for **students to demonstrate mastery** in their knowledge and skills.
 - Proficiency rates (test scores) on **new assessments may not be comparable to previous assessments**; however, over time, consistent and comparable measures of student achievement often show significant progress.

What is the Smarter Balanced “Field Test?”

- Smarter Balanced assessments were “field tested” in spring 2014 and will be fully operational in the Spring of 2015.
- The “practice run” helped ensure that the assessments are accurate and fair for all students. It also gave teachers and schools a chance to practice assessment administration procedures, and students the opportunity to experience the new assessments.
- The **field test included 11,000 students in New Hampshire** and four million students across the country.
- Smarter Balanced states will use information from the Field Test to improve the assessments.
- In any practice run, we expected glitches to occur. Working together with teachers and school administrators, we will address issues identified prior to the full launch of the assessment system in the spring of 2015.

What consequences will occur if I do not allow my child to participate in these assessments?

- Assessments help to **provide valuable information** to parents, teachers and students.
- Ultimately, the greatest penalty for avoiding these assessments is not being able to use this measure to provide meaningful information on where your student stands on their path to success.
- The state will continue, as required, to report its student participation rate in the statewide assessment by school, district and state. The target participation rate is 95 percent of students taking the statewide assessment.
- **The state, school districts and schools do not currently have any authority to waive or “opt-out” a student from the statewide assessment.**

How will my child’s privacy be protected?

- New Hampshire has one of the **strongest student data privacy laws** in the country.
- Smarter Balanced will not collect information such as student names, dates of birth, addresses, etc. that can be used to identify individual students. No parent information will be collected.
- Further, use of the Smarter Balanced Assessment will result in no changes to state reporting to the U.S. Department of Education, which includes not sending personally identifiable student data information.
- Smarter Balanced, NH DOE and local districts cannot and will not sell student information, as prohibited by federal laws, such as the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.



My child has special needs. Will these assessments work for my child?

- The Smarter Balanced assessment system will provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for students with disabilities and English language learners. The assessments will address visual, auditory, and physical access barriers—as well as the unique needs of English language learners—allowing virtually all students to demonstrate what they know and can do.
- Smarter Balanced assessments feature the most complete suite of accessibility and accommodation resources ever included in a K–12 assessment, including universal tools to assist all students, designated supports to meet student needs identified by school personnel, and accommodations for students with a documented need noted in an Individualized Education Program (IEP) or 504 plan. For more information and a complete list of features, see the *Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines* at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/parents-students/support-for-under-represented-students/>.
- For English language learners, the math assessments feature embedded glossaries in 10 languages and 4 dialects, as well as full stacked translation in Spanish.
- Features for students with documented disabilities include Braille, closed captioning, and videos of American Sign Language interpreters.
- Students with severe cognitive disabilities will still be offered an alternate assessment option through the students IEP process.