

SMARTER BALANCED ASSESSMENTS: Grades 3-8

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Smarter Balanced assessment? Smarter Balanced is Nevada's criterion referenced test (CRT) for English language arts and math. The computer adaptive test was administered to Nevada students in grades 3-8 for the first time in spring 2015. The test was developed by 22 states, including Nevada, in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Nevada is a governing state participant in the Consortium, which means that representatives from Nevada participate in all Smarter Balanced decisions.

Why was there a new assessment this year? New standards and assessments are part of Nevada's plan to help all students graduate high school ready to succeed in college and career. The Smarter Balanced assessment is an important part of implementing these new standards in math and English language arts because it will help educators and parents know if students are succeeding.

Given the problems that Nevada schools experienced with the testing, how reliable are the test results? Nevada is participating in a study that will help us understand how technical challenges some schools and students faced while taking the test may have affected students' performance. That study is being done by the Center for Assessment, and will be paid for by Smarter Balanced. It will also include Montana and North Dakota, which faced similar technical challenges.

When will we get the test scores? What is the hold up? The Nevada Department of Education expected to receive the results from our vendor, Measured Progress (MP), in August. The Department now expects to have test scores distributed to districts sometime in September. However, given the technical challenges some students faced while taking the test, Nevada is participating in a study that will help us understand how those glitches may have affected students' performance.

What happens to a school or district if the school/district doesn't meet the 95 percent participation threshold? The U.S. Department of Education (USED) could choose to sanction Nevada and other states that didn't reach the 95 percent participation threshold as required under the federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) law. NDE is engaged in ongoing, productive conversations with USED.

Is it true that student scores are likely to go down? Because Nevada's new standards set higher expectations for students and the new tests will assess student performance against those higher standards, the bar has been raised. As a result, it is likely that fewer students will meet grade level standards, especially for the first few years. Results should improve as students have more years of instruction based on the new standards. We have seen this pattern in several other states that adopted more rigorous standards years before Nevada did.

A drop in test scores doesn't mean Nevada's students are sliding backwards or learning less. Rather, it means we now have a more accurate measure of where students are on the path to success, based on the higher standards and expectations we have set to ensure our students succeed.

Is this assessment an improvement over the previous state assessment? Yes. The Smarter Balanced assessment requires students to apply knowledge and there is more to it than multiple choice and filling in bubbles. Writing is required at every grade level and new question types and performance tasks ask students to demonstrate an array of research, writing and problem solving skills. This means assessment results will provide a more meaningful picture of student performance.

How much has Nevada paid to administer the Smarter Balanced assessment this year? Nevada contracted to pay Measured Progress \$2.66 million for the 2015 Smarter Balanced assessment. Pursuant to the terms of the settlement agreement reached with MP, the total compensation to MP will be reduced by \$789,021 to \$1,867,328. Nevada also paid the Smarter Balanced consortium \$1.3 million in membership dues and test development.

Other states have decided to leave the Smarter Balanced consortium, is Nevada going to stay in the consortium? The Nevada Department of Education is currently a member and governing state participant with Smarter Balanced. The NDE isn't talking about leaving the consortium.