

FAQ for Parents: Smarter Balanced Assessments

Why is Iowa switching to a new state assessment in 2017-18?

State tests are an important measure of student learning and a critical part of our work to ensure all students receive a high-quality education. Iowa adopted statewide standards that outline consistent and rigorous expectations in English language arts and math to ensure all students move from grade to grade with the academic skills and content necessary for success beyond high school.

Because Iowa raised the bar for what we expect students to know and be able to do, the state adopted new assessments that will change the way we measure student progress starting in the 2017-18 school year. These are known as the Smarter Balanced Assessments. Better information from an assessment aligned to our state standards will help set the stage for improved student achievement.

What are the Smarter Balanced Assessments?

- End-of-year assessments customized to meet individual student needs
- High-quality interim tests to provide educators a consistent check on student progress throughout the school year
- An online library of classroom resources available to all K-12 teachers in public schools

What's different about the new assessments?

- The assessments reflect Iowa's statewide standards for what students should know and be able to do in math and English language arts, which means the assessments better reflect what's being taught in the classroom.
- In addition to subject knowledge, the new assessments will measure complex, real-world skills such as critical thinking, problem solving, and writing.
- The assessments are online and computer adaptive. By adapting to each student, these assessments present an individually tailored set of questions to each student and can quickly identify which skills students have mastered.

How can the assessments help students improve?

The assessments provide a more detailed and immediate picture of student learning by providing specific information on which skills students have mastered and where they need additional support. They also help ensure students are on track for the next grade and, eventually, college and the workforce.

What kinds of questions will be on the test?

Questions on the new assessments are in line with the work that students are doing in the classroom. The new assessments include questions that require students to demonstrate their ability to think critically and solve problems. These questions are harder for students to guess the answer to than traditional multiple-choice questions. Parents are encouraged to take the Smarter Balanced practice tests by visiting: www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/practice-and-training-tests/

What process did Iowa follow to adopt a new state assessment?

A legislatively created Iowa task force, charged with studying options for a new state assessment, recommended the Smarter Balanced Assessments in December 2014 after more than a year of extensive research and consideration in an open, transparent process.

Based on the task force's recommendation, Iowa's State Board of Education in November 2015 adopted state administrative rules implementing the Smarter Balanced Assessments; the rules moved forward following the 2016 legislative session. Iowa students in grades three through eleven will take the new assessments for the first time during the 2017-18 school year.

How much time will students spend on the end-of-year assessments?

Overall, students spend less than 1 percent of classroom time on the end-of-year Smarter Balanced Assessments, which are given during the last 12 weeks of the school year. The assessments include fewer questions. Because they require students to think critically, write essays, and analyze complex problems, the questions take more time to answer than traditional multiple-choice questions. There is no time limit – students will have the time they need to show what they know and can do.

How will my school use test results?

The assessments are not a one-time snapshot. They provide a consistent check on progress, allow teachers and parents to measure growth year to year, and provide information that teachers and parents can act on. This valuable information will help teachers adjust instruction to provide targeted support to struggling students, as well as appropriately challenging material to keep students engaged.

How will Iowa keep student testing data safe?

Protecting student data and privacy is a top priority. Iowa will retain control over student information, and federal law prohibits the creation of a federal database with students' personally identifiable information. Any recommended data collection adheres to all federal and state privacy laws, including but not limited to, the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.

Where can I go to learn more?

Parents can learn more about Iowa's transition to the Smarter Balanced Assessments by visiting <https://iowacore.gov/content/smarter-balanced-assessments>.

Parents also are encouraged to access practice tests and other resources available to help families familiarize themselves with the new assessments. Please visit: www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/practice-and-training-tests/

Who developed the Smarter Balanced Assessments?

The Smarter Balanced Assessments were developed by a consortium of states, including Iowa, guided by the belief that a high-quality assessment system aligned to rigorous academic standards will improve teaching and will help prepare students for success. Thousands of educators across the nation helped build the assessment system, including nearly 150 Iowans.