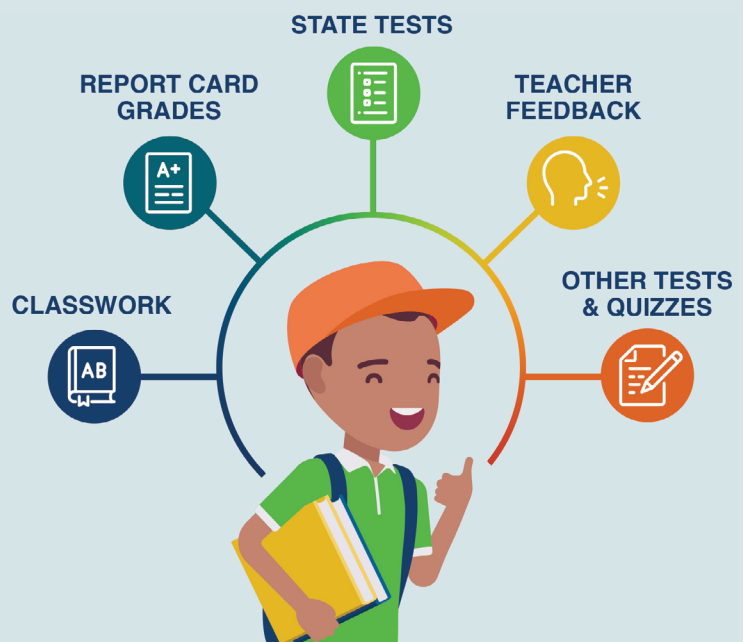




## A FAMILY GUIDE TO ANNUAL STATE TESTS IN MONTANA: One of Many Measures of Student Learning

There are many ways to measure academic performance, and annual state tests are only one of them. These tests are not meant to tell the whole story. They are meant to be combined with other measures, including teacher feedback, classwork and projects, and report card grades. Together, these measures can give families a more complete picture of a student's performance so they can better support learning at home and advocate for their child.



### State Assessments 101

The Every Student Succeeds Act or ESSA, requires students to take state tests in reading and math every year in third through eighth grade and once in high school. In Montana, students in third through eighth grade take the Smarter Balanced test in English language arts and math. Students also take a science test in fifth, eighth and 11th grade. High school students take the ACT in 11th grade, which includes reading, writing, math and science.

## A Focus on Grade Level Skills

Unlike other tests, Smarter Balanced is focused on grade level material and is aligned to the state standards. The test questions match what students do and learn in the classroom every day throughout the year, which are the skills that are most important for students to learn in order to move on to more challenging content.

The Smarter Balanced test is taken online and is computer adaptive, which means it adjusts the difficulty of the questions based on the student's responses. The test includes a variety of different types of questions, including real world problems that ask students to show and explain their answers, write well-developed essays and analyze text. Montana teachers have worked closely with the state to write and review test questions.

### Grade 6: Math

Paul could play 16 songs on his guitar. He learns some new songs. Now he can play 23 songs.

In the first box enter an **equation** to represent the number of new songs,  $s$ , that Paul learns.

In the second box, enter the **number** of new songs represented by  $s$  in this situation.

**Equation**

**Number of new songs**

### Grade 3: ELA

**Which sentence from the passage supports the idea that the Coleman brothers have experience with making maple syrup?**

- A "The Coleman brothers—Nelson Ralph, and Harold—step out their front door in Vermont."
- B "As they pass the 75-year-old sugar-maple trees, sap drips from holes in the trees into metal buckets."
- C "Every spring, the Colemans tap holes into sugar-maple trees, then hang a bucket under each hole to catch the sap."
- D "They don't worry too much about why the sap is running in their trees this morning."



## Useful Information for All

### **FAMILIES:** Understanding Grade Level Performance

The Smarter Balanced report gives families information on how well their child performed on different sets of skills in each subject. Families can use this information to identify where their child is doing well and where they may need support or practice. This helps families better support learning at home. It can also help them start meaningful conversations with teachers, set goals for each student's areas of improvement and identify resources and strategies that can be used at home and in school to help students make progress.

#### **Questions to Ask the Teacher about Your Child's Smarter Balanced Report:**

- What does this mean about my child's learning?
- Is my child on grade level?
- Where does my child need more support or improvement?
- What short-term learning goals should my child meet to show progress?
- How can I support learning at home?



### **TEACHERS:** Informing Instruction

Students take different types of tests throughout the school year. Some students take benchmark or diagnostic tests, such as MAP Growth, Smarter Balanced interims or i-Ready. These are taken several times a year and measure mastery of important concepts and skills in reading and math. Students take a test at the beginning of the year to identify their “starting point” and again throughout the year to measure their progress. Benchmark tests help teachers identify and address learning gaps early on so students can stay on track to meet grade level expectations. While the test is only given at the end of the school year, it is one way of showing how much progress students made from the beginning of the year and how well they met grade level expectations.

While teachers use Smarter Balanced results to understand each student's unique needs and support them in the areas where they need extra help, they also help teachers to improve their instruction. Teachers can use the results to look for trends in their students' learning to see what skills or concepts students learned and what content they struggled with. This helps teachers identify what they taught effectively and where they need to improve or change their instructional strategies.

### **SCHOOL & DISTRICT LEADERS:** Informing Decisions

Smarter Balanced results are critical for school and district leaders to make informed decisions about schools and students. School and district level test scores show leaders how students across a school or district are performing and indicate if a certain group of students or schools need more support. This allows them to target additional support or resources to help those schools improve. District leaders can also use test scores to understand what strategies and changes are working.



### **STATE LEADERS:** Helping Schools Improve

State leaders use Smarter Balanced results to identify schools and districts that need more support and resources. They identify the schools with the lowest performance in the state, as well as schools with certain groups of students that performed much lower on the test than the rest of the students in that school. These schools receive additional funding and resources from the state to support students and teachers. For example, schools may hire more teachers or tutors or they may purchase additional instructional materials and programs, depending on the needs of their students

#### **Where Can I Go for More Information?**

- For more information, visit [Opi.MT.gov/Leadership/Assessment-Accountability/MontCAS/Required-Assessments#828888824-general-and-alternates-tests-in-science-grades-5-8-and-11](https://opi.mt.gov/Leadership/Assessment-Accountability/MontCAS/Required-Assessments#828888824-general-and-alternates-tests-in-science-grades-5-8-and-11)
- For more details on the score report and what it means for your child, visit [MT.StartingSmarter.org/](https://MT.StartingSmarter.org/)
- To see a practice test, visit [MT.Portal.Cambiumast.com/training-tests.shtml/](https://MT.Portal.Cambiumast.com/training-tests.shtml/)
- For ideas on how to support your child's learning at home, visit [PTA.org/FamilyGuides](https://PTA.org/FamilyGuides)
- For more information about the Montana PTA visit [MontanaPTA.org/](https://MontanaPTA.org/)

