



A FAMILY GUIDE TO ANNUAL STATE TESTS IN WASHINGTON: 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 Washington, students in third through eighth grade take the Smarter Balanced test in English language arts and math. Students also take a test in science in fifth and eighth grade, known as the Washington Comprehensive Assessment for Science (WCAS). High school students take Smarter Balanced in English and math in 10th grade and the WCAS in 11th grade.

Until 2020, high school students were required to earn minimum scores on the Smarter Balanced test to receive a diploma. Now, students can choose from one of several graduation pathways to demonstrate they have learned the content and skills they need to meet their goals after high school. Achieving a Level 3 or 4 on Smarter Balanced in English and math in 10th grade is a one of the pathway options.

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 tests are taken online and are computer adaptive, which means they adjust the difficulty of the questions based on the student's responses. The tests include a variety of different types of questions, including traditional multiple choice, questions that ask students to show and explain their answers, and questions that require students to write well developed essays. Washington teachers have worked closely with the state to write and review test questions.

Grade 6: Math

Allison is saving to buy a \$500 bicycle by working during summer vacation.

- The job pays her \$8 for every 1 hour worked.
- Allison works exactly 20 hours each week.

If she works for 4 weeks and buys the bicycle, how much money will she have left over?

Grade 3: ELA

Which detail from the passage best shows that the old man's sons are lazy?

- A Since the man had to tend the field, the boys took care of the house.
- B "Oh, they would," the father replied again, "but they are still young."
- C Though they sometimes tended the field with him, they always made excuses to go home early.
- D The sons were sad, for they not only depended on their father, but they also loved him.



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, to set goals for each student's areas of improvement and to 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, i-Ready or Smarter Balanced interims. 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 Smarter Balanced 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 Smarter Balanced 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 Smarter Balanced 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 K12.WA.us/Student-Success/Testing/State-Testing-Overview
- For a Family Guide to the Smarter Balanced test, visit K12.WA.us/Sites/Default/Files/Public/Resources/Pubdocs/FamilyResource_SmarterBalanced.pdf
- For more details on the score report and what it means for your child, visit WA.StartingSmarter.org/
- To see a practice test, visit WA.Portal.Cambiumast.com/Training-Tests.stml
- For ideas on how to support your child's learning at home, visit PTA.org/FamilyGuides
- For more information about the Washington PTA visit WASatePTA.org/

