



PARENT Q&A

What is new and what are the new assessments called?

- Instead of DCAS Reading and Mathematics tests, students will begin taking Smarter English Language Arts and Mathematics tests this spring.
- The state is calling its group of assessments DeSSA for Delaware System of Student Assessments
- This includes the new Smarter English Language Arts and Mathematics tests, as well as DCAS Science and Social Studies, PSAT, SAT, ACCESS (for English Language Learners) and the state's alternate testing for students with severe disabilities. It also includes some optional assessments.

Why is my child taking new assessments this year?

- New standards and assessments are part of our district's plan to help all students graduate high school prepared for success.
- The Smarter Balanced Assessment System is a key part of implementing the Common Core State Standards and preparing all students for success in college and careers.
- The Smarter Balanced assessments provide an academic checkup for students by measuring real-world skills like critical thinking and problem solving. In addition, they provide real-time information during the year to give teachers and parents a better picture of where students are succeeding and where they need help.
- These assessments will replace existing tests, and offer significant improvements over tests of the past, including new types of questions and performance tasks that require students to apply a variety of skills to complete complex tasks that will prepare them for college and the workplace.
- Colleges are participating in the development of these assessments, with the goal of recognizing student scores on the grade 11 assessments as evidence that students are ready for introductory college courses and can be exempted from non-credit remedial courses.

Is this a different kind of test than given in the past?

- In some ways yes and in other ways no. The test will consist of a computer adaptive section and a performance task for each subject. Red Clay students are familiar with computer adaptive testing from DCAS and NWEA MAP that was done in the district before DCAS. However, types of responses on the computer adaptive part of the test and the performance task are new for our students. There will be more writing and there is a research component that uses listening skills.

Is this test more difficult than the current assessment?

- Yes, but we have been preparing for this in our classroom instruction. Students are being asked to read more complex fiction and non-fiction texts across all subjects, not just English. Then they will use evidence from the text to answer questions, make inferences, and present persuasive arguments. In mathematics, students will be doing more multi-step problems and application to real-world situations. They will have to explain how they got their answers.
- In the classroom over several years now, we have been doing close reading with text-dependent questions and asking students to use evidence from their text to support their answers. In mathematics, we have been giving students more performance-type assessments. Resources are available for teachers to support their instruction.



What will the assessments cover?

- The Smarter Balanced assessments measure real-world skills in English and math, such as analytical reading, persuasive writing, and problem solving.
- In addition to providing composite scores in those two subjects, score reports will provide information on student performance in the following areas:
 - English: reading, writing, listening, and research
 - Math: concepts and procedures; problem solving and modeling/data analysis; and communicating reasoning
- Parents can access complete Practice Tests in English and math for grades 3 through 8 and 11 at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/practice-test/>.

How long will the assessments take?

- The math and English 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.
- These tests are not timed, but we estimate that the English assessment will take 3.5 (for elementary students) to 4 hours (for high school students) and the math assessment will take 2.5 hours (for elementary students) to 3.5 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 several days.

What types of questions will student see?

There will be 4 main types of questions:

1. Selected response, such as multiple choice where more than one answer may be correct.
2. Technology enhanced, for example when a student might click, drag, or highlight text.
3. Short constructed response, which are short written responses.
4. Extended constructed response, which are longer written responses such as those that will be done in the Performance Tasks

What are some examples of a performance task?

- A performance task requires students to research, write, and apply skills to a real-world situation.
- For example in mathematics, students might be asked to design new cereal boxes to use less cardboard but hold the same or greater volume than the original boxes.
- In ELA, students might be asked to read several articles with opposing views on a topic, evaluate the sources, and then present an argument on their stance.
- One practice performance task has high school students preparing an essay for a school board meeting where they take a stance on requiring a financial literacy course for graduation. In the essay students are asked to address counterarguments and support their argument using the sources they reviewed.



What grades are tested and when?

- Students in Red Clay will take the test after spring break. School-specific schedules are created based on the number of computer labs and the number of students. Schools will communicate their schedule with their parents.
- Grade 3: Smarter ELA and Mathematics
- Grade 4: Smarter ELA and Mathematics, DCAS Social Studies
- Grade 5: Smarter ELA and Mathematics, DCAS Science
- Grade 6: Smarter ELA and Mathematics
- Grade 7: Smarter ELA and Mathematics, DCAS Social Studies
- Grade 8: Smarter ELA and Mathematics, DCAS Science
- Grade 9: PSSS (a PSAT test, March)
- Grade 10: PSAT (Fall)
- Grade 11: PSAT (Fall), SAT (April 15th), Smarter ELA and Mathematics
- Red Clay high school students taking U. S. History and Algebra II or Integrated Math III will take a DCAS End of Course test
- Also students in special groups may take additional tests such as English proficiency tests for our English Language Learners and alternative tests for our students with severe cognitive disabilities

When will parents receive results from the Smarter Balanced assessments? What kind of report will parents receive on student progress?

- Since the written part of the test must be hand-scored by trained scorers, final results will not be immediate. The Department of Education expects reports to be mailed to parents in August.
- Score reports will include an overall score for English and math and results for particular topics such as reading and writing. In addition, the reports will include an “achievement level” for each subject that groups scores into one of four categories. Students scoring at levels 3 or 4 appear based on the test results to be making appropriate progress toward college and career readiness.
- The achievement levels were developed with extensive input from teachers, college faculty and parents. Teachers who work with English language learners and students with disabilities were included to help ensure that the achievement levels are fair and appropriate for all students.
- In addition to achievement levels there will also be sub-test scores, called claim scores. For ELA, scores will be reported for reading, writing, listening, and research. For Mathematics, scores will be reported for concepts and procedures, problem solving/ modeling/ data analysis, and communicating reasoning.
- Teachers and parents can use the score reports, along with other evidence on student performance such as course assignments, to develop a comprehensive picture of where students are thriving and where they need additional support.

How will the scores change with the new assessments?

- The new content standards set higher expectations for students. And the new tests are designed to assess college and career readiness using these content standards as a benchmark. This means that expectations for student achievement are higher than they used to be.
- As a result, it is likely that fewer students will score at the higher achievement levels on the assessments, especially the first few years. Results should improve as students have more years of instruction based on the new standards.

Does this mean that students will not perform as well as they did previously?

- No. It's important to keep in mind that the tests have changed and are measuring different things—such as whether students are developing critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.
- These results do not mean that schools are performing worse or that students are learning less. The scores represent a new baseline that provides a more accurate indicator for educators, students, and parents.
- Our schools are working to make sure that students can meet the challenge of these new standards and succeed in high school and beyond.

How have schools been preparing students?

- Classroom activities and class tests prepare students for the content and depth of knowledge required by these tests.
- We also provide opportunities for students to become familiar with the test format.
- Students in Red Clay are already familiar with computerized tests and some tools such as highlighting, strikethrough, scrolling, and using a mouse. Yet they need more practice with other skills such as keyboarding to type out their written responses.
- Therefore, in the months of February and March students will take practice tests, including performance tasks in each subject. Students with special needs who have test accommodations will also get to practice using those.

How can parents prepare their child for these tests?

- Suggestions for everyday activities that keep parents involved, informed, and engaged are:
 - **Read** with your children
 - **Review** and discuss their homework
 - **Communicate** with their teachers
 - **Attend** school and public meetings
 - **Learn** about the standards and how they affect your child's education and school
 - **Look** through your child's backpack each afternoon
- Some testing specific suggestions coming from PTA include:
 - **Discuss** the new tests with your child. Make sure he or she is not scared or anxious going into the new tests. With an older child, explain that the new assessments were created to help him or her better prepare for college and career.
 - **Explain** to your child that the tests will initially be more challenging. Tell your child you have high expectations and that you are there to help every step of the way.
 - **Review** test results with your child. Bring the teacher into the discussion as needed.
 - **Provide** a quiet, comfortable place for studying at home and make sure your child gets a good night's sleep and a nutritious breakfast before a test.

from delexcels.org



How will my child's privacy be protected?

- Delaware Department of Education retains control of all student information, including assessment results.
- In order to make sure the assessments are accurate and fair for all students, Smarter Balanced will collect the following student information:
 - An identification number (the Consortium recommends that this be different from the state's official unique student identifier so that only the state can link back to a student's official education record);
 - Race/ethnicity, gender, grade level, school attended;
 - Student eligibility for English language development services or special education services provided to the student;
 - Student eligibility for Title I compensatory programs;
 - Smarter Balanced assessment scores, achievement levels, and responses to assessment questions.
- Unless directed to do so by Delaware, 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.
- Smarter Balanced will not share student-level information with the U.S. Department of Education. Further, use of the Smarter Balanced assessments will result in no changes to state reporting to the U.S. Department of Education.
- Smarter Balanced, Delaware, and districts cannot and will not sell student information, as prohibited by federal laws like 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 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.
- 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/>

Where can people get more information?

- Red Clay Assessment Internet Page http://www.redclayschools.com/pages/RedClay/Parents_and_Students/Assessment/Delaware_System_of_Student
- Delaware's DeSSA portal <http://de.portal.airast.org>
- Smarter Balanced www.smarterbalanced.org
- DeExcells coalition (DOE, DSEA, Delaware PTA, Rodel) www.deexcels.org