

Wisconsin's New Assessments

Key to Meeting Higher Academic Standards

Wisconsin is moving from a paper-and-pencil test with multiple choice questions to an online assessment system with computer-adaptive questions. Computer-adaptive tests adapt to the individual student. If the student answers an item incorrectly, the next item will be easier. If the student answers an item correctly, the next item will adapt to be more difficult. This is a key advancement in student assessment and provides a much more precise measure of what students know. Wisconsin is taking advantage of this technology because it provides better information to teachers, parents, and students themselves.

The new assessments will give schools more information and more flexibility.

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter) is producing the end-of-year summative test that meets the federal requirements for student testing. Smarter is also providing a number of optional assessments for teachers to use as they wish. The whole system includes:

- **Summative.**
 - End-of-year standardized assessments in English Language Arts and Mathematics that Wisconsin is required to administer to Grades 3-8.
 - Aligned to our state standards.
 - Data is used for accountability report cards.
- **Interim.**
 - Optional assessment used by teachers to benchmark progress throughout the year.
 - Aligned to the summative assessment.
 - Data is used locally by schools and teachers.
 - Not used for accountability.
- **Formative.**
 - Optional instructional strategies used by teachers to assess their students during lessons.
 - No data are reported.
 - The information from these formative assessments should help teachers effectively plan lessons for students who need more instruction on the standards being taught.
 - Resources and strategies are organized in a digital library accessible by all educators in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.

The new assessments will give a more accurate picture of each student's knowledge and skills.

Computer-adaptive results are provided far more quickly than with paper-and-pencil tests, and are more precise in telling parents and educators what their students know. This helps to quickly focus students on specific areas of improvement. Additionally, Smarter includes performance tasks which allow students to demonstrate their learning in ways that are not possible with a multiple choice test. Further, students are able to access the test better with the computer-based accommodations offered. For example, students will now be able to increase font size and flag items to come back to on the Smarter test. This allows students to demonstrate what they know without the disadvantage of text size. *[Also see:*

<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/parents-students/>]

Parents, educators, and community members will be able to compare student achievement between schools, districts, and even other states to ensure that all Wisconsin students are being prepared for college and careers.

The new assessments will give teachers faster results so they may individualize teaching.

Smarter assessments will be integrated with teaching practice. Teachers can get results quickly and customize instruction to meet different students' needs—just the opposite of making instruction more standardized. The new assessments provide better information.

- **High Expectations.** The new assessments are closely aligned with the Common Core State Standards, which educators across the state report are already leading to higher academic outcomes. The new assessments use a wider variety of questions and tasks with a heavier emphasis on critical thinking.
- **Fast.** Computer based testing returns results in days instead of months.
- **Precise.** Smarter assessments will use computer-adaptive technology, which delivers more precise information about students' strengths and weaknesses than before.
- **Timely.** The new assessments provide interim checkpoints and real-time assessment activities for teachers to embed in lessons. Feedback from these tools enables teachers to continuously gauge student progress during the course of the year, and it helps students focus their own efforts.

These advances in assessment help teachers make the proper adjustments to help individual students succeed; schools to make smart curricular and professional development choices; and students to be more engaged in their education.

The new assessments are cost effective.

The cost per student of the WKCE, our current summative assessment, has been approximately \$24/student. The cost per student of Smarter—three interconnected assessment options—is approximately \$29/student. For this increase, teachers, parents, and students will receive far more timely and precise information about student performance.

The new assessments protect student privacy.

Student information will be rigorously safeguarded. Like health records, students' educational data is strictly protected by federal and state laws and policies. The new assessments do not loosen any existing privacy requirements. Smarter has a student data privacy policy that strictly safeguards student privacy. It also specifies that states retain control of all student results. Identifiable student data is never shared with anyone, including the federal government.

The new assessments are a state-led initiative with strong Wisconsin leadership.

The need to change Wisconsin's assessment system was clearly laid out in 2008 by the Next Generation Task Force (http://oea.dpi.wi.gov/oea_ngatf). In 2010, Wisconsin helped create the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, subsequently winning funding to develop a comprehensive assessment system aligned to college and career ready standards. Ever since, we have been strong leaders in shaping the direction of Smarter. This has been an effort led by states, with substantial and vital local input.

- **Educator Input.** Over 200 Wisconsin educators have been involved in developing the Smarter assessments, including an active State Network of Educators who help direct the formative aspect of the assessment system.
- **Field Testing.** Over 20% of Wisconsin students will participate in the field test.
- **Wisconsin Leadership.** Staff served on the Executive Committee and all Smarter workgroups.

Wisconsin schools are ready.

We laid the groundwork for this assessment system years ago, and districts are ready for the Smarter assessments. Schools have been incorporating the Common Core into their chosen curricula since 2010 and educators have actively prepared to administer the new assessments.

- In Fall 2013, 92% of Wisconsin schools reported that they are both device and bandwidth ready to administer the new assessments online. [Also see <http://tinyurl.com/wiscsbac1> for resources on technology readiness.]
- Teachers have shifted their instruction to cover the more rigorous state standards that will be measured by the new tests. [Also see [http://commoncore.dpi.wi.gov/.](http://commoncore.dpi.wi.gov/)]
- Teachers have access to sample tests so they can become familiar with the kinds of questions and tasks that the Smarter assessments will include.
- Across the state professional organizations have been heavily invested in this preparation. [[http://www.awsa.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=872.](http://www.awsa.org/displaycommon.cfm?an=1&subarticlenbr=872)]
- DPI issues quarterly updates on consortium timeline, news, and progress: http://oea.dpi.wi.gov/oea_smarter.