

A BIG WIN FOR DELAWARE STUDENTS



The Common Core State Standards

In 2013, Delaware's on-time high school graduation rate was on the rise and at its highest point in recent years—80%. But only 19% of that year's graduating class met the college readiness score of 1550 on the SAT. That same year, on the Nation's Report Card, also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), less than half of all 4th graders and only one-third of 8th graders demonstrated proficiency in reading and math. But on the Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System (DCAS), almost three-fourths of these students were deemed proficient in both subjects. The bar was set too

low—although students were graduating high school and achieving proficiency on the state assessments, they were not prepared for college and careers. Recognizing this disconnect, the State Board of Education adopted a set of college- and career-ready standards in 2010 in English language arts (ELA) and math to help ensure students were learning the skills most essential for college and the workforce.

The previous state standards did not provide students with the skills they needed for successful futures. According to the Fordham Institute, the ELA standards were among the worst in the country and the math standards, although clear and well-organized, lacked some essential content, especially at the high school level. On the U.S Chamber of Commerce's 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, Delaware's state standards received a D in rigor. In addition, the state received an F in postsecondary workforce readiness.

The state board's decision to adopt improved standards was clearly needed. Delaware was one of more than 40 states and the District of Columbia to adopt college- and career-ready standards. They were implemented in all schools across the state in the 2013–14 school year. With the adoption of higher standards, Delaware is one step closer to ensuring that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2020, 61% of jobs in the state will require a postsecondary credential. However, only 36% of adults currently have such a credential, resulting in a 25% skills gap. Higher standards are essential to closing this gap.

Delaware's Proficiency Rates on the 2013 NAEP and DCAS

Assessment	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
DCAS	74%	74%	71%	73%
NAEP	42%	38%	33%	33%



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Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers across Delaware have been hard at work preparing curricula to align with the standards since their adoption. Although the standards outline the skills and content instructed in the classroom, the materials used in the classroom are decided by schools and districts. Teachers have spent countless hours on professional development, curricula alignment, and learning strategies to engage students more deeply than ever before.

The next phase of this work is to implement aligned assessments that are more meaningful to students, teachers, and parents in determining which skills a student has or has not yet mastered in order to be prepared for college and careers. The state needs a test that can measure the critical thinking and problem solving skills that our students need to succeed—existing state tests cannot evaluate this level of learning. Improved assessments are an opportunity to move beyond rote memorization “bubble tests” to ones that mirror the higher standards and provide teachers with valuable information on how effectively they are teaching and students are learning.

Putting better assessments in place is critical and needs to be part of a larger system of accountability that supports student achievement and holds schools accountable for successfully teaching the content outlined in the standards. At the heart of accountability is the need to ensure that all students across Delaware receive the same high-quality education. Meaningful tests serve as school-wide academic checkups that can identify struggling students and schools in need of extra support so interventions can be put in place. In addition, improved assessments can identify high-achieving students who require support to maintain their academic engagement and provide them with the resources necessary to continue to excel.

For the past four years, teams of academics, testing experts, and teachers have been working tirelessly to create two new testing options aligned to college- and career-ready standards: PARCC (Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. These two testing systems were field tested in spring 2014 in 35 states, including Delaware, where students participated in the Smarter Balanced field test.

The tests aim to do the following:

- Accurately measure students’ progress toward college and career readiness.
- Assess a wide range of skills, including critical thinking and writing skills.
- Provide real-time information on student progress to help guide teacher instruction and improve learning.

Delaware is a governing member of the Smarter Balanced consortium. Students in grades 3–8 and 11 will take the Smarter Balanced assessments in English language arts and math in spring 2015. These computer-adaptive assessments will adjust the difficulty of questions throughout the test to more accurately measure which skills a student has mastered. The question types will vary and will require students to respond with longer essays and explain their reasoning. The Smarter Balanced system also provides a Digital Library, an online collection of aligned resources that support teachers in using in-class formative assessments to ensure students are keeping pace throughout the year.

During this transition, it is important to advocate for key criteria that will make the state assessments a strong measuring stick of how Delaware students are doing on the path to college and careers at the state and national levels. Leaders continue to be enthusiastic about the Smarter Balanced assessments because they meet so many of the criteria that make up a high-quality aligned test. As advocates, we need to ensure that the assessments accurately measure

college and career readiness and serve as a useful tool to benefit students.

A High-Quality Assessment

- Is developed with input from academic and testing experts, and most importantly, teachers.
- Is field tested and reviewed before full implementation.
- Assesses a wide range of real-world skills using a variety of question formats.
- Includes formative or interim assessments that act as academic checkups to make sure students are keeping pace.
- Provides detailed and timely feedback that sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are not on track so that interventions can be put in place.
- Identifies high-achieving students so they can receive the support necessary to continue to excel.
- Is comparable across states.

Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the difference between standards and curriculum?

- Standards are a set of guidelines for what students are expected to know and be able to do at specific points in their education. Standards provide the foundation for key components of the education system, including curricula, instructional materials, teacher training, and assessments.
- A curriculum is the course of study covering the standards. It is set by local school districts and includes the lesson plans, programs, and textbooks that teachers use to teach the content and skills outlined in the standards.

2. If students are learning with different curricula, how can they take the same test?

- Although teachers use different materials and curricula, students still learn the same skills outlined in the standards. Teachers can be creative in their instruction, designing



The Delaware Common Core State Standards

- Are more rigorous academic standards that prepare all students for success after high school.
- Emphasize real-world skills like critical thinking and problem solving.
- Are comparable across states.

Better Assessments

- Give an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- Ensure that all students are held to the same expectations.
- Identify struggling students so they can get the help they need.
- Identify high-achieving students so they can receive the resources they need to continue to excel.

Smarter Balanced Consortium

- A group of states working together to develop high-quality, computer-adaptive assessments that measure college and career readiness in both math and English language arts.

lessons to best reach their students and establishing classrooms where all students can achieve.

3. Will the new test replace the old state test?

- Yes. The Smarter Balanced assessments will replace the Delaware Comprehensive Assessment System (DCAS) in grades 3–8 and 11 in math and ELA this spring.

4. Will annual test scores impact schools and districts?

- School-wide test results will be used as one measure for school accountability. Just as tests are used as academic checkups for individual students, they also serve as checkups for our schools. Districts need to identify struggling students and schools in need of support so that interventions can be put in place to ensure that all students across Delaware receive a high-quality education.

5. Will test scores impact teachers?

- For the first year of testing, Smarter Balanced scores will not be used as a part of teacher evaluations. In 2016, student growth as evidenced on the Smarter Balanced tests will be included in teacher evaluations.

6. How will test scores impact students?

- There are no testing requirements for graduation or promotion.

7. What kind of data will be collected? Will it be released?

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, Delaware is required to collect data on school performance. Aggregate data collected includes student test scores and information such as attendance, support services, and academic growth. *The state will not release any personally identifiable student information.* Only individuals who interact with students on a daily basis, such as teachers and parents, are allowed to see student-specific information.

- Federal law protects the privacy of student information and education records through the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA). The only information that will be publicly available will contain aggregate data for schools, districts, and subgroups.

8. How were teachers involved in the test development process?

- Delaware teachers were involved in a review of the test questions for content, bias/sensitivity, and accessibility. They also assisted with the development of learning resources in the Digital Library, an online collection of aligned resources to support teachers as they adjust to teaching the standards.

9. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students need to be computer literate. Paper and pencil versions will be available during the first three years of testing for schools that cannot meet the technology requirement.
- While it may take time to ensure that every school has the hardware necessary and meets the technology requirements, this is a smart investment. Technology is not going away. Ensuring that all students, regardless of geography or household income, have equal access to technology is critical to preparing students for a 21st century competitive workforce.

10. Where can I go for more information?

- www.smarterbalanced.org
- www.dedoe.schoolwires.net/domain/111
- www.de.portal.airast.org/smarter/
- www.delexcels.org
- www.BusinessForCore.org