

2016 Smarter Balanced Test Results: Frequently Asked Questions

Oregon has state tests in English Language Arts and Math. Why?

In 2010, the State Board of Education adopted more [rigorous instructional standards in English and Math](#). Over the past six years, educators across the state have worked together to implement these standards in every K-12 classroom in Oregon. The standards are designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills they need at every step along their educational journey so they can graduate high school fully prepared for success in college and the workplace. In order to assess how well students are mastering these higher standards, the state uses statewide tests known as Smarter Balanced. Oregon students in grades 3-8 and 11 take these tests each spring.

How are these tests different than in the past?

The tests move beyond the rote memorization and “fill in the bubble” format of past multiple choice state tests. Students are asked to write, reason, think critically and solve multi-step problems that better reflect classroom learning and the real world. For the first time, our standards – and our tests – are aligned with the expectations of colleges and employers.

What do student results mean?

The results provide a clearer picture about what Oregon students know and can do – and where they need the most help – so the state can raise expectations for all students and help ensure they are prepared for future success. Higher education values these results. Students who receive a 3 or 4 on the assessment have the opportunity to move directly into credit-bearing courses without the need for additional course entrance exams at Oregon community colleges and public universities.

How do I interpret Smarter Balanced scores?

The Smarter Balanced exams are not pass/fail exams. Students who receive a 3 or 4 on the test (on a four-point scale) are considered on track to graduate high school prepared for their next steps. Those who receive a 1 or a 2 will receive additional support to help them get on track. Students receive feedback on how they did overall as well as on specific areas in English Language Arts and Math so that they can work with their teachers on addressing areas needing improvement.

Are these tests “high-stakes?”

No. While these tests provide valuable feedback on student learning, they are only one measure of students’ academic success and no student will be held back a grade or be kept from graduating based on the results of this assessment alone. The results are one important piece of the puzzle schools and teachers use to improve instruction, better align services and supports and ensure students are getting the help they need to fill learning gaps early.

When will students and parents receive results?

Schools will be distributing Individual Student Reports to parents either through in-person meetings or through the mail over the coming weeks. If parents have questions about their child’s results, they should contact their child’s school for additional information regarding the dissemination of these reports.

How will results on the state tests impact graduation rates?

These new tests should not impact graduation rates because the expectations for graduation have not changed. Students in Oregon are required to demonstrate proficiency in the [Essential Skills](#) of reading, writing, and math in order to earn a diploma. They can demonstrate this proficiency on state tests, but they can also do so on other standardized tests (PSAT, SAT, ACT, etc.) or on locally administered assessments.

Why is participation on state tests important?

Historically, in Oregon and around the country, not all schools tested all students. Students of color, English Learners or those receiving special education services were sometimes tested at lower rates. This made it very difficult to identify and address opportunity gaps. The federal government set a participation target of testing 95% of all students overall and 95% in all student groups to ensure that the results are truly reflective of a school, district or state's students.

How does low participation impact test results?

Statewide, 95% of students took the test. However, in some districts and in some schools, participation dipped below 95%.