Smarter Balanced

The Smarter Balanced assessment system provides mathematics and English language arts (ELA) assessments for grades three through eight and high school. It also provides online tools and resources to support teachers in formative assessment and a set of optional interim assessments for subscribing member states. This document will:

- Provide a brief introduction to the Smarter Balanced assessment system; and
- Describe the main components of the Smarter Balanced assessment system

Introduction

In 2010, the US Department of Education awarded a Race to the Top Assessment grant to a consortium of 30 states to develop an assessment system aligned with the Common Core State Standards. The resulting Smarter Balanced assessment system reached full implementation by 2015.[i] As of 2017-18, 11 states (CA, CT, DE, HI, ID, MT, NV, OR, SD, VT and WA) use Smarter Balanced as their assessment of math and English language arts for grades three through eight. Seven of those 11 also use Smarter Balanced in high school.[ii] An additional state, Michigan, uses Smarter Balanced items on its state assessment. Indiana also plans to use Smarter Balanced items on a new state assessment for the 2018-19 school year.[iii] Smarter Balanced membership has declined from 32 states in 2010 to 13 states in 2017.[iv]

Components of the Smarter Balanced Assessment System

The three main components of the assessment system are a digital library of tools and resources to support teachers in the formative assessment process, optional interim assessments and summative end-of-year assessments.

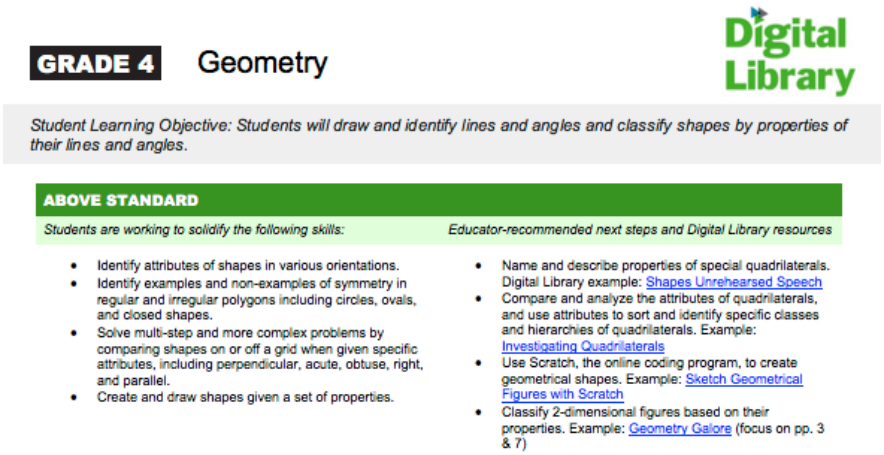
Digital Library Resources to Support Formative Assessment Process[v,vi]

Smarter Balanced provides a "Digital Library," which is an online collection of more than 3,000 instructional and professional learning resources.[vii] These resources are all available online to teachers in subscribing member states. There is a focus on providing resources to support teachers in the formative assessment process, and every resource is designed to address at least one aspect of the formative assessment process.[viii] But many resources appear to have broader utility as well (e.g., a professional learning resources on teaching fractions for elementary school teachers).[ix] Resources include:

1. Instructional materials, such as activities and lessons, to supplement curriculum
2. Professional learning resources for educators
3. "Playlists," which are collections of instructional or professional learning resources from the Digital Library selected and organized around specific skills and topics. Playlists are described as time-saving tools for teachers because they do not require searching for individual resources in the Digital Library.[x]

The Smarter Balanced Digital Library State Networks of Educators (SNEs) of 60 to 150 members per state create resources for the Digital Library and evaluate resources created by other SNE members.[xi] The Digital Library includes some commissioned resources (i.e., created by contractors), but most resources are created by SNE members. All SNE-created resources are reviewed by at least three other SNE members, based on quality criteria developed by Smarter Balanced, to ensure they are aligned with state learning standards and will help teachers implement the formative assessment process. State Leadership Teams of eight to 12 educators per state recruit and train educators for the SNEs, monitor and support their work, help review resources and make final publishing decisions.[xii,xiii,xiv]

There are three types of Playlists. The first type is Instructional Playlists. They focus on content found on Smarter Balanced Interim Assessment Blocks, which cover narrow sets of topics/concepts and can be used for formative assessment (see next section below). The second type is Connections Playlists, which link student performance on Smarter Balanced Interim Assessment Blocks to resources in the Digital Library based on student achievement levels (Below, At/Near or Above Standard). For example, teachers of grade four mathematics can access a Connections Playlist focused on Geometry at all three achievement levels (see the "Above Standard" section of this Geometry Playlist below). For students at each achievement level, teachers can use the Connections Playlist to identify the skills that students are working on, recommended next steps and relevant Digital Library resources:



GRADE 4 Geometry

Digital Library

Student Learning Objective: Students will draw and identify lines and angles and classify shapes by properties of their lines and angles.

ABOVE STANDARD

Students are working to solidify the following skills:	*Educator-recommended next steps and Digital Library resources*
• Identify attributes of shapes in various orientations. • Identify examples and non-examples of symmetry in regular and irregular polygons including circles, ovals, and closed shapes. • Solve multi-step and more complex problems by comparing shapes on or off a grid when given specific attributes, including perpendicular, acute, obtuse, right, and parallel. • Create and draw shapes given a set of properties.	• Name and describe properties of special quadrilaterals. Digital Library example: Shapes Unrehearsed Speech • Compare and analyze the attributes of quadrilaterals, and use attributes to sort and identify specific classes and hierarchies of quadrilaterals. Example: Investigating Quadrilaterals • Use Scratch, the online coding program, to create geometrical shapes. Example: Sketch Geometrical Figures with Scratch • Classify 2-dimensional figures based on their properties. Example: Geometry Galore (focus on pp. 3 & 7)

Finally, Professional Learning Playlists are collections of resources for professional development that can be used independently or in professional learning communities. These resources are organized by topic.[xv]

Optional Interim Assessments[xvi,xvii,xviii]

Optional Interim Assessments are in use in ten states.[xix] They are used at the discretion of districts and schools for teachers to be able to check student progress throughout the year, not for accountability purposes. Districts have flexibility setting the timing, administration policies and scoring practices for interim assessments. These assessments are administered online and are non-secure, meaning that teachers are able to view the assessment questions and their students' responses to the questions to adjust instruction as needed. Although the interim assessments are designed for grades three through eight and high school, they can be administered to students in any grade level.

There are two types of Interim Assessment: Interim Comprehensive Assessments (ICAs) and Interim Assessment Blocks (IABs). Interim Comprehensive Assessments test the same content and report scores on the same scale as summative Smarter Balanced assessments. They can be used for interim assessment after a "significant" period of instruction, or to test the knowledge and skills of students who are in non-tested grades or are new to the district or state. They take between three and four hours to administer, like the Smarter Balanced summative assessment. There is one mathematics and one ELA IAC for each grade level three through eight and one for high school (grade eleven).[xx,xxi]

Interim Assessment Blocks (IABs) focus on smaller sets of related concepts and provide more detailed information for instructional purposes. Because they are narrower in scope than ICAs, they can be administered in a sequence that

corresponds to the curriculum. They can usually be administered in one class period and include between four and 18 assessment items, depending on grade level and content. IABs for math and ELA are organized by grade and topic. For ELA, as of 2017-18 there are nine IAB topics for grades three through seven, seven topics for grade eight and nine topics for high school. For example, the IAB "Read Literary Texts" is available at all of these grade levels. For math, as of 2017-18 there are six IAB topics for each grade three through eight, and ten topics for high school. For example, the IAB "Geometry" is available for each grade three through eight and "Geometry Congruence" and "Geometry Measurement and Modeling" are available for high school.

ICAs and IABs are administered online as fixed form tests but are also available as adaptive tests, depending on content (for IABs) and item counts. Most assessment items are computer-scored. Scoring of the constructed response items and performance tasks (e.g., essay) that need to be hand-scored are a state/local responsibility.

Summative Assessments[xxii,xxiii]

Finally, Smarter Balanced provides summative assessments in English and mathematics for grades three through eight and high school. They are administered at the end of the school year and take between three and four hours each to administer.

Summative assessments have both a computer adaptive test and a performance task, described below. The computer adaptive test starts with a question in the medium range of grade-level difficulty and adjusts based on a student's responses, meaning that the next question is easier following an incorrect response and harder following a correct response.[xxiv,xxv] Smarter Balanced lists the following benefits of computer adaptive testing (CAT):[xxvi]

- Questions are tailored to each student to identify which skills students have mastered. This means that fewer questions are required for accurate scoring, so adaptive tests can generally be shorter.
- Test questions are more secure and can be used for longer periods of time because not all students receive the same questions
- CAT provides a more accurate measure of student achievement. Results have smaller margins of error. CAT can also better assess a range of students who may not be at grade level, since the test is limited to grade-level questions for only approximately the first two-thirds of the test. After that, it can adjust to students with questions that are above or below grade level.
- Results of computerized assessments are available faster

Performance tasks measure students' critical thinking and problem-solving skills. They are a collection of questions or activities organized around a single theme or scenario. For example, a sample grade four ELA performance task requires students to review three informational text sources about animal habitats, answer questions about them and write an informational article using information from the texts.[xxvii] Performance tasks are taken on a computer, but they are not computer adaptive.

In addition to Performance Tasks, Smarter Balanced assessments include the following question types: selected-response questions; non-traditional response questions (e.g., drag-and-drop, editing text, drawing an object); and constructed-response questions, in which students produce a text or numerical response.[xxviii]

---

[i] http://www.smarterbalanced.org/about/history/
[ii] http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/mbquest5E?rep=SUM1806
[iii] http://ecs.force.com/mbdata/mbquest5E?rep=SUM1806
[iv] https://education-first.com/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/Education-First-What-Happened-To-State-Tests-Feb-2018-6.pdf
[v] http://www.smarterbalanced.org/educators/the-digital-library/
[vi] https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/digital-library-flier.pdf
[vii] http://www.smarterbalanced.org/educators/the-digital-library/
[viii] https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/diglib-sneflyer.asp
[ix] http://www.rcoe.us/educational-services/files/2015/11/4.-Formative-Assessment-and-the-Smarter-Balanced-Digital-Library-ppt.pdf
[x] https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/digital-library-playlists-flier.pdf
[xi] https://www.sde.idaho.gov/assessment/isat-cas/files/digital/training/smarter-balanced/general/Formative-Assessment-Initiatives.pdf
[xii] http://www.smarterbalanced.org/collaboration-connections-digital-library-resources-oh/
[xiii] https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/documents/sneflyerfinal.pdf
[xiv] https://www.edweek.org/media/sbac_final_narrative_20100620_4pm.pdf
[xv] https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/documents/plsformfound.pdf
[xvi] http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/
[xvii] https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/interim-assessments-overview.pdf
[xviii] https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/reporting-system-interpretive-guide.pdf
[xix] http://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/interim-assessments-digital-library-m-step.pdf
[xx] https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/mathematics-interim-comprehensive-assessment-blueprint.pdf
[xxi] https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/ela-literacy-interim-comprehensive-assessment-blueprint.pdf
[xxii] https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/reporting-system-interpretive-guide.pdf
[xxiii] http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/
[xxiv] http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/testing-technology/
[xxv] https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/creating-a-computer-adaptive-test.pdf
[xxvi] http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/testing-technology/
[xxvii] http://sampleitems.smarterbalanced.org/Item/Details?bankKey=187&itemKey=2667
[xxviii] http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/sample-questions/