

Introduction to the Computer Adaptive Testing

The Smarter Balanced tests, which are part of the new California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) are ready for their a trial run. This spring, student in school district throughout the state will participate in a field test of the new assessments that are aligned with the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT) is the cornerstone of this test.

What is Computer Adaptive Testing?

Computer Adaptive Testing is a key component of the Smarter Balanced tests that have been designed to improve a student's experience. The computer program for these tests adjusts each question's level of difficulty while a student is taking the test. For example, if a student answers a particular question correctly, the student then is given a more challenging question. If a student answers the question incorrectly, the student then is given a question that may be less challenging. Of course, there will be some questions with the same level of difficulty that will be asked of all students. Regardless of the difficulty of items, all students will be tested on their grade-level content, and all students will have an opportunity to demonstrate their understanding of the CCSS for the subject being tested.

What are the benefits?

Computer Adaptive Testing provides a tailored experience for each student. This approach is a big improvement over the typical paper-and-pencil assessments still given in many states. These tests usually include many questions that are too difficult so students just guess the answers or are too easy so students are not challenged to demonstrate their true ability. Computer Adaptive Testing provides a more accurate picture of what students really know and are able to do. This new technology also measures a broader range of each student's achievement level.

Computer Adaptive Testing:

- Presents questions to students that match their ability,
- Gives students baseline questions to determine their starting level,
- Gets progressively harder or/easier questions based on performance,
- May be based on individual questions or groups of questions,
- Provides a more accurate measure of student growth,
- Provides better instructional information,
- Provides a challenging but accessible testing experience for each student.

How can I help my student prepare for this new state test?

One way to help your child better understand the design and format of this field test is to provide opportunities for them to work with the test format and questions.

The California Department of Education (CDE) has made the Smarter Balanced practice tests for grades 3-8 and 11 in English language arts/ literacy and mathematics available at <https://sbacpt.tds.airast.org/student/>. These practice tests provide a preview of the Smarter Balanced tests design and question types that may be used during the field test. Users of the practice tests, however, should note that they do not encompass the full range of questions and tasks that students may have on the actual test beginning in the spring 2015. The practice tests are NOT computer adaptive but follow a “fixed form” model like the paper and pencil tests of STAR.

In addition, the practice tests provide an opportunity for children and their parents to become familiar with the online testing environment before taking the actual tests. The practice tests provide a snapshot of question types that will appear on the Smarter Balanced tests beginning in the spring of 2015. These question type will include constructed-response, technology-enhanced, selected-response, and performance tasks.

The CDE has also placed on its website sample items and performance tasks to show the types of questions that may be included as part of the Smarter Balanced tests beginning in 2015 (<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks/>).

To further help your child prepare for the field test, provide opportunities for them to use a computer or tablet (iPAD or Android type device) device keyboard to become familiar with the location of letters and numbers and typing answers or using a mouse. You can also look up games on the websites that will allow children to practice typing skills or using a mouse by clicking, moving objects, highlighting, or crossing out letters (All these tools are used on the test).

To practice the testing tools, you can take the Practice Test at:
www.sbac.portal.airast.org/Practice-Test/

When will this test be taken?

The field test for the Smarter Balanced tests will be taken by students in your child’s school district between March 18 – June 6, 2014. Each district has been assigned a specific testing window.

More Information

Additional information can be found on the CDE Field Test Questions and Answers Web page at <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/smarterftqa.asp>

General questions about the state assessments should be directed to the CDE Statewide Assessment Transition Office by phone at 916-445-8517 or by e-mail at sbac@cde.ca.gov.