

A BIG WIN FOR NEW HAMPSHIRE STUDENTS



New Hampshire College and Career Ready Standards

In 2011, New Hampshire's on-time high school graduation rate was 87%, higher than the national average. However, on the most recent Nation's Report Card—also known as the National Assessment of Educational Progress, or NAEP—only about 40% to 60% of students in each tested grade were proficient in reading and math. Even though most New Hampshire students were graduating high school on time, many were not mastering the skills needed for success in college and careers. To remedy this problem, in 2010, the State Board of Education adopted a set of college- and career-ready standards in English language arts and math to ensure students were learning these critical skills.

New Hampshire's Proficiency Results on the Nation's Report Card

Year	4th Math	4th Reading	8th Math	8th Reading
2011	57%	43%	44%	40%
2013	59%	45%	47%	46%

New Hampshire's previous standards, developed in collaboration with other New England states in the early 2000s, did not take advantage of modern research on college and career readiness. On the U.S Chamber of Commerce 2007 *Leaders and Laggards* report, the standards received a 'D' because they lacked rigor. Now, New Hampshire's College and Career Ready Standards prioritize the most important skills and content and provide the opportunity for a deeper level of understanding.

With the adoption of higher standards, New Hampshire is one step closer to helping ensure that students will have the opportunity to reach their full potential. By 2018, there will be more than 200,000 job openings in New Hampshire due to newly created positions and retirements, 64% of which will require education beyond high school. On the last census, only 46% of the state's working-age population held a two- or four-year degree, resulting in a 17% skills gap. By raising the bar, we can be confident that more of our students will successfully compete for these jobs, pursue a rewarding career in New Hampshire, and contribute to the growth of our economy.



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Better Standards Deserve Better Assessments

Teachers across New Hampshire have been hard at work putting these higher academic goals in place. Many have committed extensive personal time to understanding the standards. Over the past four years, teachers have attended hours of training and collaboration to develop aligned curricula and lesson plans that engage students more deeply than ever before.

The next phase of this work is to implement an improved test in New Hampshire that is more meaningful to students, teachers, and parents in determining which vital skills a student has or has not yet mastered. We need a test that can measure the critical thinking and problem-solving skills that parents, teachers, business leaders, and higher education leaders have said our students need in order to be successful. While current state tests cannot evaluate this level of learning, improved assessments present the opportunity to move beyond rote memorization and “bubble tests” to assess a deeper level of learning.

What Does a High-Quality Assessment Look Like?

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.
- Provides detailed and timely feedback that acts as an “academic checkup” and sends an early warning signal to teachers if students are not on track so interventions can be put in place.
- Is comparable across states.

The testing system offered by the Smarter Balanced Assessment consortium meets the criteria of a high-quality assessment. After much research, New Hampshire signed on as a governing member of the consortium in 2010. Through this membership, a team of academics, testing experts, and teachers has been working tirelessly for the past four years to create a testing option aligned to higher standards. The annual assessment was first piloted in 30 New Hampshire schools in 2013 and field-tested this past spring by schools in many states, including 99 in New Hampshire.

The tests will replace the New England Common Assessment Program (NECAP) for students in grades 3–8 and 11 in math, reading, and writing this spring. They go beyond multiple-choice assessments of the past by engaging students in test items that more closely reflect the learning that takes place in the classroom. This comprehensive assessment system not only includes end-of-year tests, but also interim tests and formative materials that can be used at various points throughout the year. These serve as academic checkups and give teachers the opportunity to provide interventions and additional challenges for students who need it. In addition, improved assessments can identify high-achieving students who require support to maintain their academic engagement and provide the resources necessary to continue to help them excel. Comprehensive end-of-year reports will provide teachers and parents with a detailed snapshot of progress to indicate how well students are mastering skills.

During this time of transition, it is important to ensure that New Hampshire’s assessment system provides a reliable measure of how students are doing on the path to college and careers. Policymakers, teachers, and school officials continue to be enthusiastic about the Smarter Balanced assessments because they meet so many of the criteria that makes up a high-quality aligned test. As advocates, we need to ensure that the state tests not only accurately measure college and career readiness, but also possess these characteristics to serve as a useful tool to help students improve.



Frequently Asked Questions

1. What is the difference between curriculum and standards?

- Standards are a set of guidelines that set expectations of student skill at specific points in their education. Standards provide the foundation 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 lessons to best reach their students and help them succeed.

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

- The Smarter Balanced tests will replace the NECAP in math, reading, and writing in grades 3–8 and 11.

4. How will annual test scores impact schools and districts?

- Eventually, school-wide test results will be used as one way to measure school progress. Just as we use tests as academic checkups for individual students, they are used as checkups on our schools. Districts need to identify areas of low performance so that interventions can be put in place to ensure all students across New Hampshire receive a high-quality education.

5. How will test scores impact teachers?

- Teachers will use the test scores as feedback on how effective their curricula and lesson plans are at instructing the new standards. In the first years, assessment results will serve primarily as a new, more realistic baseline against which to measure future progress. The benefit of the new standards will become apparent as they mature and incoming students have progressed through standards-based classrooms.
- New Hampshire's Model Educator Support & Evaluation System recommends, but does not require, that districts use multiple measures of student performance as 20% of the teacher

Why support the New Hampshire College and Career Ready Standards?

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

Why do we need good tests?

- They give us an honest, objective report of how our students are doing.
- They ensure all students are held to the same expectations.
- They identify struggling students so they can get the help they need.

What is Smarter Balanced?

- 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.

evaluation. Most districts use the New Hampshire model as the starting point for their evaluation policies, but they are free to set their own policies.

- The New Hampshire model uses a student growth model in teacher evaluations, which measures progress from one testing point to the next. A baseline score needs to be collected to measure growth so teacher evaluations are unlikely to include test scores until 2017. This will also allow time for students and teachers to adjust.

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

- Under the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act, New Hampshire is required to collect data on the performance of schools. 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.
- New Hampshire makes its own policies on the collection, storage, and use of student data according to state privacy laws, which are considered among the toughest in the country. The Smarter Balanced consortium must adhere to all state and federal laws pertaining to the collection and storage of such data.

7. What are the benefits of collecting student performance data?

- Collecting and analyzing data on student performance provides a comprehensive measure of student progress. The Smarter Balanced reports provide detailed information about different competencies (areas of content and skills) in which student learning occurs. This helps to pinpoint curriculum strengths and weaknesses and allow teachers to tailor their instruction to student needs, while providing parents feedback on the progress their children are making.

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

- New Hampshire teachers were involved in the Smarter Balanced consortium through labs, discussions, the development of more than 20,000 test questions, and a preliminary pilot test last year. Teachers also reviewed test questions for content, bias/sensitivity, and accessibility and 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. How long will the tests take?

- It is estimated that the Smarter Balanced assessments will take between 4–4.5 hours for math and 3–4 hours for English language arts. This is significantly less time than the NECAP language arts test, which took between 6–7 hours to complete, and still comparable to the math test, which took between 3–4.5 hours to complete.
- These tests are of much higher quality, so the time invested will provide parents and teachers with more detailed and useful information on student progress than ever before.
- On average, students currently spend more time on district benchmark assessments than state tests. Since the Smarter Balanced tests assess a wider range of skills and provide better information, they have the potential to eliminate many of the district assessments, reducing the overall time students spend testing.

10. Do students need to be computer literate?

- Students will need to be computer literate, but paper and pencil versions will be available during the first three years of testing for schools that do not yet meet the technology requirement or prefer that method.
- There are many benefits to computer-based tests. The Smarter Balanced tests are computer-adaptive, adjusting to a student's demonstrated level of understanding by basing the difficulty of future questions on previous answers, which allows for a more precise measure of student achievement.

11. Will schools be able to meet the technology requirements of the assessments?

- In an informal survey conducted by the New Hampshire Department of Education, virtually all schools reported that they have the technology and bandwidth necessary to administer the Smarter Balanced assessments.
- While it may take some time to ensure that every school can flawlessly administer online assessments to large groups of students, 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.

12. Where can I go for more information?

- www.smarterbalanced.org
- www.education.nh.gov/instruction/assessment
- www.BusinessForCore.org