

From: Seattle Public Schools <publicaffairs@seattleschools.org>

Subject: 2017-18 Assessments letter

Dear Families,

Every year, our state requires all districts to administer assessments in mathematics, science, and English language arts (ELA). The testing window for the math and ELA state assessments for grades 3-8 and grades 10-11, called the Smarter Balanced Assessment (or SBA), has opened. SBA is an important element of instruction and helps teachers support student learning and make informed instructional adjustments.

The Smarter Balanced Assessment measures student learning against expected grade level standards. Our educators have worked hard through their everyday teaching to prepare students. Students should not feel stressed about the assessment: it is simply one measure that lets them show what they have already learned. We know they will do their best.

Over these next few weeks, you can help us prepare your child for the best outcome by encouraging your child to do their best and to demonstrate what they have been learning in class. Setting a strong morning routine, including a healthy breakfast, will also help all students come to school fully prepared and ready to achieve academically.

Since the testing window opened last month, I have heard a number of questions that I would like to address directly.

Are these assessments a meaningful use of student time? Yes. Teachers use the previous year's scores to set academic goals and targets for each student. In order to address the specific needs of each student, we need to be able to track and monitor overall student performance. The state-required assessments provide one common measure of how all students are progressing toward our district's academic goals. In addition, District and school level data supports resource allocation and targeted interventions aimed at closing achievement gaps and accelerating learning, our district's primary strategic goal.

Are there any other reasons these assessments are necessary? Yes. When families opt out, our federal funding is jeopardized. District administration of the assessments is a state requirement and is part of our federal accountability. As a district, we are required to have at least 95 percent participation. Because some of our schools did not meet this requirement, OSPI has notified the district of the possibility that funding could be withheld.

Is the state requiring more assessments? No. SBA replaced the previous state test (HSPE). The SBA is not an *additional* assessment but rather a *replacement*.

Since the first year of Smarter Balanced administration, we have improved scheduling, added more computers and students have become more familiar with the process. The SBA should now take about the same amount of time as the former state tests that the SBA replaced.

What are the benefits of these assessments? These assessments offer several improvements, compared with previous state-required tests:

- **They closely match our learning standards.** The tests are directly connected to what students are learning, so students really are "showing what they know" near the end of the school year. That means teachers and principals use the results to adjust teaching for the next year to better support student learning and their individual strengths and needs.
- **They require students to demonstrate more complex thinking.** The test provides real-world scenarios that require students to demonstrate multiple skills such as reading, writing, and problem solving. Math assessments require students to solve problems that involve multiple steps. The test tells us how well students can apply what they have been learning in class.
- **They measure college and career readiness.** All of the SBA assessments are based on progress toward

college and career readiness skills and required knowledge; the former state tests were based on 10th grade standards. The 11th grade Smarter Balanced Assessment results are recognized by our state colleges and may be used to waive remedial coursework for students who pass.

- **They are designed to adjust to each student's individual skill and ability.** The assessments are computer-based and adaptive. If the student gets an answer incorrect, the assessment offers an easier item. If the student gets an answer correct, the assessment offers a more challenging item. This means less stress for struggling students and more challenge for confident students. This also allows for more accurate student scores and for growth to be measured across grades, something we couldn't do with previous state assessments.
- **They prepare students for graduation.** Tests in earlier grades let families know if their child is on track to pass the 11th grade test. The 11th grade ELA test is required for graduation.

What other supports are you providing? We have been working each year to provide more access to computers which are used year-round for student learning. We have also provided a district-wide keyboarding program, *Typing Agent*, that may be used at home or school to help students prepare. Families may also view practice tests on the [Smarter Balanced webpage](#).

What if I want to opt my child out of the SBA? Families have the right to opt out/refuse participation in the Smarter Balanced Assessments. Requests must be made in writing and provided to the school principal on an annual basis. For your convenience, a form is provided on the [Smarter Balanced FAQ page](#). The school will do their best to accommodate your child during the testing period if you choose to opt out. Generally, that means finding them a quiet place to read or do homework (in the office or library). Since teachers are usually engaged in supervising the assessments, we are unable to provide alternative instruction.

How do I learn more? To support families, we have set up a [Smarter Balanced webpage](#) to provide you with additional information, a family video, practice tests, as well as additional frequently asked questions.

Thank you for being part of our Seattle Public Schools family. It is a privilege to serve you and your student. If you have questions about assessments in Seattle Public Schools, they can be sent to sbadmin@seattleschools.org

Regards,
Dr. Larry Nyland
Superintendent



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