

Common Core State Standards (CCSS)/ Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBAC) FAQs

General Questions

Q: Why are the Common Core State Standards important?

A: High standards that are consistent across the states provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations that are aligned to the expectations in college and careers. The standards promote equity by ensuring all students, no matter where they live, are well prepared with the skills and knowledge necessary to collaborate and compete with their peers in the United States and abroad. Unlike previous state standards, which were unique to every state in the country, the Common Core State Standards enable collaboration between states on a range of tools and policies, including: The development of textbooks, digital media, and other teaching materials aligned to the standards; The development and implementation of common comprehensive assessment systems which measure student performance annually (replacing existing state testing systems); and Changes needed to help support educators and schools in teaching to the new standards.

Q: Will Common Core curriculum be introduced in the fall of 2014 or 2015?

A: Common Core objectives are currently being introduced in classrooms across the District. Full implementation will occur over the next two years.

Q: Are school board members and teachers in Claremont supportive of the new standards?

A: The Governing Board, administrators, classified, and certificated staff are all supporting the transition to the Common Core State Standards.

Q: Who was involved in the development of the Common Core?

A: States across the country collaborated with teachers, researchers, and leading experts to design and develop the Common Core State Standards. Each state independently made the decision to adopt the Common Core. Local teachers, principals, and superintendents lead the implementation of the Common Core in their states. The federal government was not involved in the development of the standards.

Q: Why are the Common Core State Standards only for English Language Arts and Math?

A: English Language Arts and Math were the subjects chosen for the Common Core State Standards because they are areas upon which students build skill sets that are used in other subjects. Students must learn to read, write, speak, listen, and use language effectively in a variety of content areas, so the standards specify the literacy skills and understanding required for college and career readiness in multiple disciplines. There are required literacy standards in History/Social-Science, Science, and technical subjects for grades 6–12 that are meant to supplement content standards in those areas, not replace them.

Q: How do the Common Core State Standards compare to previous state education standards?

A: The Common Core was developed by building on the best state standards in the United States; examining the expectations of other high-performing countries around the world; and carefully studying the research and literature available on what students need to know and be able to do to be successful in college, career, and life. No state was asked to lower their expectations for students in adopting the Common Core. The evidence-based standards were developed in consultation with teachers and parents from across the country, so they are also realistic and practical for the classroom

Instruction

Q: How will this change what my student is currently learning?

A: The standards provide more clarity and consistency than our former standards. The Common Core State Standards focus on the content that students need to know. Students will be required to apply their learning through real world problem solving including reading, writing, and mathematical practices across all subject areas.

Q: What do the Common Core State Standards mean for students?

A: Today's students are preparing to enter a world in which colleges and businesses are demanding more than ever before. To ensure all students are prepared for success after graduation, the Common Core establishes a set of clear, consistent guidelines delineating what students should know and be able to do at each grade level in English Language Arts and Math.

Q: How do the Common Core State Standards impact teachers?

A: The standards impact teachers by: 1) Providing them with consistent goals to ensure students are progressing on a path for success in college, career, and life; 2) Providing them with consistent expectations which benefit students who move into their districts and classrooms from other states; and 3) Providing them the opportunity to collaborate with teachers across the country as they develop curricula, materials, and assessments linked to high-quality standards.

Q: Do the standards tell teachers what to teach?

A: Teachers know best about what works in the classroom. That is why these standards establish what students need to learn, but do not dictate how teachers should teach. Instead, teachers decide how best to help students reach standards.

Q: What is the remediation plan for those students having trouble getting through the standards?

A: Teachers will continue to provide both remediation and enrichment in order to differentiate learning for students and to allow students to successfully master grade level standards.

Q: Are current English and Math materials going to be modified or altered to fit CCSS or are there plans for new materials adoptions?

A: Teachers in CUSD will teach using parts of our current adopted textbooks along with supplemental materials. Unfortunately, the publishing companies have not produced many strong textbooks that align with the CCSS at this time.

Q: Which Math pathway did CUSD select and why?

A: Secondary Mathematics for the Common Core State Standards are organized into two pathways - a Traditional Pathway (Algebra I, Geometry, Algebra II); and an Integrated Pathway (Integrated Math I, Integrated Math II, and Integrated Math III). Regardless of the selected pathway, the learning objectives are exactly the same, they are just organized differently. It is a local school district decision whether to follow a Traditional or Integrated approach. CUSD has chosen an Integrated model to allow students to build proficiency and see connections and interrelationships between each of the mathematical domains. In addition, this pathway is developmentally more appropriate for students and aligns with the Smarter Balanced test as well as other high-stakes assessments such as the ACT, which have integrated questions and prompts. Most school districts are selecting the Integrated approach to CCSS implementation.

Q: Are higher level Math courses (those after Integrated Mathematics III) unchanged?

A: All of the higher level Math courses such as: Calculus, Statistics, AP Statistics, IB Math, Finite Math, etc. remain unchanged.

Q: Do all 7th grade students take the same Mathematics test regardless of their Math course?

A: Yes. All 7th graders will take the Smarter Balanced 7th Grade Math Test, even if they are enrolled in Math 8 or Integrated Math I. Similarly, all 8th graders will take the Smarter Balanced 8th Grade Math Test and 11th graders will take the Smarter Balanced 11th Grade Math Test.

Q: What is the time frame for phasing in the new Math curriculum?

A: Alterations to current course content have already been carried out in order for the Integrated Pathway to be implemented starting in the fall of 2014. The only exception to this transition is for students currently enrolled in Geometry. These students will finish the Traditional path and finish the sequence with Algebra II during the 2014-15 school year.

Q: Will there be an opportunity for my student to work above grade level in Math?

A: Yes. Students who meet specific criteria can be placed in accelerated course work.

Q: What is happening to the high school "Technology Education" graduation requirement? Will it phase out as a separate course requirement?

A: Staff members have begun to design a K-12 scope and sequence built around the CCSS technology skills. CUSD is currently creating technology objectives, lessons, and training for teachers. This process may take several years, thus, the current "Technology Education" graduation requirement will remain status quo until a K-12 technology instructional program can be designed.

Q: Because Common Core is only for ELA and Math, what will happen to the emphasis on science, history, and other subjects?

A: Science, history and other subjects are involved in unit planning to align with the ELA and Math CCSS. Science will continue to be assessed at grades 5, 8, and 10 and teachers will still implement unit tests, benchmark assessments, projects, and activities that will be used for assessment in all subject areas.

Special Populations

Q: What are the Smarter Balanced implications for special populations? Who will upload the accommodations?

A: Students with disabilities and students who are English learners are expected to participate in the Smarter Balanced Field Test and subsequent operational test. The only exceptions on the Field Test are for students who participate in the California Alternate Performance Assessment (CAPA). English learners who have been attending school in the United States for less than twelve months will only be required to take the Math portion. Smarter Balanced has provided the Usability, Accessibility, and Accommodations Guidelines, which describe the planned supports on the Smarter Balanced assessments. This document provides guidance to classroom teachers, English development educators, special education teachers, and related services personnel in selecting and implementing supports.

Q: Will children with Individual Education Plans (IEPs) have goals developed to meet the CCSS?

A: Each IEP shall continue to include a statement of measurable annual goals that reflect consideration of the California State Content Standards which are the CCSS.

Q: Will Special Education and English language development teachers be trained in Common Core State Standards?

A: All teachers throughout the district are receiving training in order to implement the CCSS.

Q: Are special-needs children expected to use the iPad and keyboard to take the Smarter Balanced assessment?

A: This is an IEP team decision.

Testing

Q: Are the Smarter Balanced Assessments the same nationwide?

A: There are two consortiums developing assessment systems aligned to the [Common Core State Standards](#) in English Language Arts and Mathematics. These two consortiums are the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) and the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Career (PARCC). States had to select to administer one of these two systems. California has chosen to implement the Smarter Balanced Assessments.

Q: Why aren't all grades tested with the Smarter Balanced Assessment?

A: The federal government requires testing to be conducted in grades 3-8 and once in high school. The Smarter Balanced Consortium has aligned themselves to these federal mandates as multiple states are utilizing this new assessment. States may individually choose to test other grade levels. California has discussed adding additional grades, and Assembly Bill 484 requires the State Superintendent of Public Instruction to present recommendations for expansion of the testing system by March 2016.

Q: Are the Smarter Balanced assessments timed tests?

A: No. Smarter Balanced assessments are designed as untimed tests; some students may need and should be afforded more time.

Q: Will the increased time allotted for Smarter Balanced testing take a significant amount of time away from instruction?

A: The former state test or CSTs had a similar "window" to conduct the testing and took approximately the same amount of time to administer.

Q: Will the CUSD benchmark tests be changing?

A: Yes, the Smarter Balanced consortium is designing benchmark exams to accompany the end-of-year summative assessment. CUSD will be examining these tests to utilize or modify once they are published.

Q: How can parents help prepare students for testing?

A: Smarter Balanced released online [Practice Tests](#) that provide an early look at sets of assessment questions aligned to the Common Core for grades 3–8 and 11 in both English Language Arts/literacy and Mathematics. The Practice Tests allow interested parties to experience the features of online testing and gain insight into how Smarter Balanced will assess students' mastery of the Common Core. In October, 2012, Smarter Balanced released [sample items and performance tasks](#) that illustrate the variety of innovative item types students will encounter on the Smarter Balanced assessments.

Q: Will Smarter Balanced assessments replace the SAT and ACT?

A: No. The 11th grade summative assessment is not designed to be a college admissions test. Colleges and universities vary in how much they rely upon the SAT and ACT—and in the scores on those tests they expect students to meet. We believe institutions of higher education will continue to rely on scores from the SAT and ACT in the admissions process for the immediate future.

Q: Will students still need to pass the California High School Exit Exam (CAHSEE) to graduate?

A: Yes. The state of California still requires that all students pass the CAHSEE in order to graduate from a public high school.

Q: Is it true that the Smarter Balanced online tests adjust to the individual student as they are testing?

A: The Smarter Balanced assessment system capitalizes on the precision and efficiency of [computer adaptive testing \(CAT\)](#). This approach represents a significant improvement over traditional paper-and-pencil assessments used in many states today. Computer adaptive testing adjusts to a student's ability by basing the difficulty of future questions on previous answers, providing more accurate measurement of student achievement, particularly for high and low-performing students. For more information, download a [CAT factsheet](#).

Q: Are the SBAC tests norm-referenced or criterion-referenced?

A: The SBAC assessments are criterion referenced based upon the CCSS.

Q: How long are the tests or the testing periods?

A: Estimated testing times are available in the document, [Scoring Reporting and Estimated Testing Times](#). It is important to note that these are estimates of test length for most students. Smarter Balanced will use data collected through the Pilot and Field Tests to revise estimated testing times.

Technology

Q: Where are the funds for the technology coming from?

A: Equipment needed for the implementation of the CCSS is coming from the Common Core State Standards funds that were provided to districts throughout the state of California and supplemented with General Fund dollars.

Q: How will elementary schools with a greater number of Socio-Economically Disadvantaged students have access to technology?

A: District staff has worked out an equitable schedule for technology equipment (iPad carts) to be accessed by all schools.

Q: Will all students have access to necessary equipment prior to the Smarter Balanced test?

A: All students and schools are having an opportunity to practice prior to the Smarter Balanced Field Test, which will be administered from April 14 through May 16, 2014.

Q: How can we have peace of mind about the online security?

A: The Smarter Balanced assessment uses a secure browser. All other applications are "locked" to the students during test administration.

Q: If students will be reading from an iPad, will the font size be adjustable?

A: Yes. The font size is adjustable on an iPad.