

Vernonia School District Smarter Balanced Assessments: Parents Opting-Out

January 4, 2016

Dear Parent/Guardian

With the 2015-16 school year well under way, I wanted to take a moment to provide some important information about this year's state tests.

Last spring, students in the Vernonia School District and around Oregon took new state tests in English Language Arts and Math, called Smarter Balanced. The tests move away from previous fill-in-the bubble exams that focused on rote memorization, to a format which asks students to explain their reasoning and write out their answers. These new tests measure more complex, real-world skills such as critical-thinking, writing, and problem solving so that your child can successfully transition from grade to grade and be prepared for his or her next steps after high school.


Mist Grade School, Vernonia Elementary School, Vernonia Middle School and Vernonia High School will give Smarter Balanced tests starting as early as February 9, 2016. The tests are not timed so your child can take as long as he or she needs to fully demonstrate what he or she knows and can do.

We know that an end-of-the-year test cannot possibly tell us *everything* about your child's academic progress. However, the results do act as a snapshot of your child's strengths and areas for improvement and can be used as a way to ensure he or she is getting the supports he or she needs. Additionally, the tests help the Vernonia School District's efforts to equitably distribute resources and support student learning. When fewer students take the test, we are left with an incomplete and inaccurate picture of how our students are performing, and this limits our ability to address issues, better serve students, and continue to improve our educational system.

In order to opt your child out of testing for the 2015-16 school year you must complete a form. The form can be picked up in the Vernonia Schools office, and is also posted online on our website at www.vernonia.k12.or.us. Should you wish to opt your child out, please submit the form to the Vernonia School's Main Office. You can read more about your rights to opt-out here: <http://tinyurl.com/OR-HB2655>.

In Vernonia we are deeply committed to ensuring each and every student in our schools has the supports he or she needs to achieve at high levels and graduate prepared for his or her next steps. Our ultimate goal is to make sure that all students are set up to be successful from grade to grade and that will remain the focus of our district throughout the rest of the school year.

If you have general questions or want more information about the end-of-year tests, please see the attached factsheet or visit our website at. I encourage you to reach out to your child's teacher(s) with any questions you may have about your student's progress.

Sincerely,

Aaron Miller
VES/MGS Principal


Nate Underwood
VMS/VHS Principal

Higher Standards, Better Assessments

Preparing Oregon Students For Life After High School

Oregon is committed to providing a quality K-12 education for all students, regardless of where they live or which school they attend. Over the last 5 years, our public schools have been working hard to implement college and career-ready standards, known as Common Core. These standards provide clear expectations for what every student should know and be able to do at each grade level. Now, we are using new tests aligned to our higher standards that will measure the real-world skills our students need to be successful in the 21st Century.

SMARTER BALANCED IS A BETTER TEST

Smarter Balanced Assessments are different from Oregon's previous tests in several ways:

1. **The tests challenge students** to think critically and apply their knowledge and skills to real-world problems.
2. **The test questions go beyond multiple-choice** and allow students to explain their answers; interact with texts, and build equations.
3. **The test provides all students, regardless of disability or primary language**, with the supports they need to demonstrate what they know and can do.

WHAT TO EXPECT

Students will take Smarter Balanced English and Math tests **once at the end of the school year** in grades 3-8 and 11.

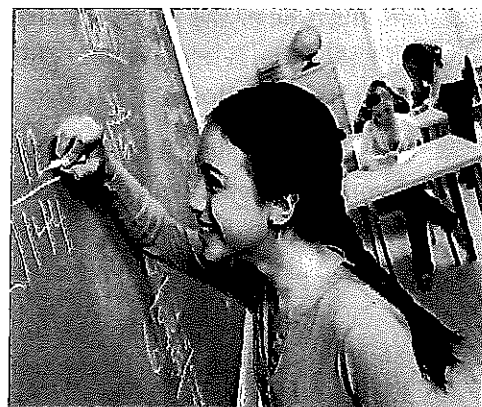
Students who **receive a 3 or 4** on the test (on a 4-point scale) **are considered on track to graduate** high school college- and career-ready.

These tests are one measure of students' academic success and **no student will be held back a grade or kept from graduating** based on the results.

WHAT THE RESULTS MEAN

Scores **represent a new baseline** and **provide more honest information** about what our students know and can do – and where they need the most help – so we can raise the bar for all Oregon students.

Patience and persistence will be required as we transition to higher expectations but this year's results indicate that Oregon students and teachers are rising to the challenge.



Visit www.ode.state.or.us/search/page/?id=4302 to learn more about the tests





DESCRIPTION OF RIGHTS

House Bill 2655 permits parents and adult students* to annually opt-out of Oregon’s statewide summative tests in English Language Arts and Math by submitting this form to the school the student attends. The school shall provide any student who is exempted from a state test with supervised study time while other students are testing. Visit this link to learn more about House Bill 2655: <http://tinyurl.com/OR-HB2655>.

To opt-out of state tests this section must be completed by the parent/guardian or adult student:

Student’s Legal Last Name _____

Student’s Legal First Name _____

Student’s ID Number _____ Enrolled Grade _____

Student’s School _____ Date _____

Please indicate the state test(s) you are opting out of for the 2015-16 school year:

	English Language Arts
	Mathematics

To best support school district planning, you are encouraged to submit this form to your child’s school no later than February 1, 2016. For students who enroll after the statewide testing window begins on February 9, 2016, you are encouraged to submit the form within 2 weeks of enrollment. This form is only valid for the 2015-16 school year. Parents and adult students are required to submit an opt-out form annually should they wish to be exempted from statewide summative tests.

I understand that by signing this form I may lose valuable information about how well my child is progressing in English Language Arts and Math. In addition, opting out may impact my school and district’s efforts to equitably distribute resources and support student learning.

Parent/Guardian* (signature) _____

*Adult students (age 18 and older) may sign on their own behalf and do not require a signature by a parent or guardian.

Parent/Guardian or Adult Student (printed name) _____



ALL STUDENTS GRADUATE PREPARED

In 2010, Oregon adopted higher K-12 standards in English Language Arts and Math to ensure all students move from grade to grade with the academic knowledge and skills necessary for success beyond high school. Because we raised the bar for what we expect students to know and be able to do, we have also changed the way we measure student progress through our state tests, known as Smarter Balanced.

How much time do the tests take?

The tests are not timed so your child can take as long as he or she needs to fully demonstrate what he or she knows and can do. With our new exams, your child only tests once each year, unlike our previous exams which many students took multiple times. Learn more about the estimated time your child may take to complete the tests on Page 35 of Oregon's Test Administration Manual: <http://tinyurl.com/TestAdminManual>.

What do the results mean and where do I get my child's results?

Test results identify your child's strengths and areas for improvement in English Language Arts and Math. Each subject will be broken into categories and will show how well your child performed in each area. The tests measure student learning on a 4-point scale. Your school will share your child's scores with you at the beginning of the next school year to help support your child's success as he or she moves from grade to grade.

Why does participation matter?

While no single test can give a complete picture of your child's progress, having your child take the statewide tests provides educators and administrators with information about what educational approaches are working and where additional resources are needed. Your child's participation is important to ensure schools and districts receive the targeted resources they need to help all students succeed.

When will my child take the test?

Your child will be tested once after he or she has completed at least two-thirds of the school year. Your child's school will determine the specific dates your child takes the tests within the statewide testing window above.

OREGON'S STATE TESTS

- **Challenge your child to think critically** and apply his or her knowledge to real-world problems
- **Go beyond multiple choice** and ask your child to explain his or her answers
- **Act as a snapshot of your child's progress** and may be considered along with other pieces of information to determine your child's academic success
- **Help identify schools and districts** that need additional supports to ensure more students are meeting higher standards

STATEWIDE TESTING WINDOWS

Smarter Balanced English Language Arts & Math Tests
February 9 – June 10, 2016

Oregon Extended Assessments for English Language Arts & Math
February 18 – April 28, 2016

STAY INFORMED

Talk to your child's teacher or school principal if you have questions or want to learn more. Patience and persistence will be required to help our students and schools continue towards success.

Resources

To learn more about what your child should know and be able to do in English Language Arts & Math: <http://tinyurl.com/ELARoadmap> & <http://tinyurl.com/MathRoadmap>

To view sample test questions: <http://tinyurl.com/ORPracticeTests>

To read more about your child's results: <http://tinyurl.com/ORTestResults>

TEMPLATE: FAQ for Parents

Why are the scores lower?

These new tests are designed to challenge students, so it's not surprising the results are different from previous years. What's important to remember is that the results represent a new baseline that teachers and parents can use to measure progress toward college and career readiness.

Lower test scores do not mean that schools are performing worse, or that students are learning less. Similarly, a drop in student proficiency scores does not reflect a drop in performance, but is a reflection of the higher standards Oregon adopted to ensure students achieve 21st century college and career readiness. As with any change, there is a period of transition as teachers and students get used to the new standards and tests.

In Kentucky, the first state to begin using the Common Core State Standards, the percentage of high school graduates ready for college and career has increased from 34 percent to 62 percent in the four years.

Is this a new test? Why did we change?

The Smarter Balanced tests are new this year and replace the previous end-of-year tests in English and math. The new assessment is aligned to Oregon's college-and career-ready standards, which set clear, consistent guidelines for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level in math and English. The new test provides a more accurate indicator of where students are on their path to success after high school.

What subjects and grades are tested?

The Smarter Balanced tests assess student performance in math and English in grades 3-8 and 11.

What's different about the new assessment?

The new assessment, which replaced Oregon's previous end-of-year tests in English and math, asks students to demonstrate and apply their knowledge and skills in areas such as critical thinking, analytical writing, and problem solving.

Through our work with the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, Oregon is administering a high-quality assessment that has benefited from input from classroom teachers, principals, curriculum directors and other educators, as well as experts and state education agency staff from Oregon and across the country.

What is a "good score"?

The student test results mark a new baseline that enables all of us to know where students stand on their path to success in college and career. We are committed to ensuring that all students are prepared with the critical thinking, problem solving, and reasoning skills that they need to be successful in life.

Students scoring a 3 or 4 have mastered content and are on target for being ready for college-level coursework. Students receiving a 1 or 2 have not yet mastered content and will likely need greater supports.

A full breakdown of the score results can be found [here](#).

TEMPLATE: FAQ for Parents

How will test results be used? [Use the following questions to guide your state specific response.]

- **Will these scores exempt students from remedial education?**
Our new academic standards are guidelines that have been mapped to what students need to know to be able to successfully complete entry level college courses without remediation. Students meeting or exceeding grade level achievement standards should not need remediation in college. In fact, more than 200 colleges, including Oregon universities and community colleges, have already agreed to exempt students from developmental coursework if they meet proficiency standards on their end of year test.
- **Will these scores impact student promotion?**
No student will be held back a grade or kept from graduating based on the results of the assessment alone.
- **Will these scores impact teacher evaluations?**
Teachers in grades 4-8 will use Smarter Balanced data to set student learning and growth goals for the 2015-16 school year.

What can teachers do with the results?

Our dedicated teachers are focused on helping all students succeed. These scores are one of many factors that provide teachers with feedback on how they can best meet the needs of the students in their classrooms. Districts will work with teachers to reflect on their practices and strengthen instruction through continued professional development and collaboration.

What can schools do with the results?

Having accurate and descriptive data is an important part of ensuring that our schools are providing all students with a quality education. The new data will help our district improve instruction, strategically support teachers, and assess school performance as compared with other schools across our state and country.

What can parents do with the results?

Parents should review the results and work with teachers to identify strategies to improve student performance. For example, tutoring or after-school programs may be available to help students practice their skills. In addition, parents can support their child's learning at home by focusing on areas needing more work. Parents should also encourage their children to do their best and reassure them that test scores are only one indicator of progress.

What can parents do to help their children?

Parents are essential to a child's success. By working together with their child's teacher, they can identify ways of supporting their child both in and outside the classroom. For example, teachers may be able to recommend reading strategies that parents can practice at home with their child.