

Plainville Citizen Op-Ed, January 2014

The new Common Core State Standards have brought with them a new standardized assessment that will replace the state's Mastery Test (CMT) and Academic Performance Test (CAPT). The new Smarter Balanced Assessment in mathematics, reading, and writing will be field tested this spring with students in grades 3 through 11. Students in grades 5, 8, and 10 will also be assessed with the old CMT and CAPT science tests.

Plainville students will take their science assessments in March, and the new Smarter Balanced field test will be given in May. The Smarter Balanced Assessments have been developed by a consortium of 22 states, all of whom will participate in the field test. The purpose of the field test is to provide a trial run of this new assessment system in order to help ensure that the assessments are valid, reliable, and fair for all students. It will also give us an opportunity to familiarize our students, teachers, and administrators with the test prior to the first operational assessment in the spring of 2015. Ninth and tenth grade students will participate in the field test as a means of becoming familiar with the format of the test. The information gathered on 9th and 10th grade student achievement will be used to help develop a method of showing growth over time as students move from elementary to middle to high school.

Unlike the CMT and CAPT, which were organized around "strands", the Smarter Balanced Assessments are organized around claims. In mathematics, there are four claims:

Claim #1 - Concepts and Procedures: “Students can explain and apply mathematical concepts and interpret and carry out mathematical procedures with precision and fluency.”

Claim #2 – Problem Solving: “Students can solve a range of complex well-posed problems in pure and applied mathematics, making productive use of knowledge and problem solving strategies.”

Claim #3 – Communicating Reasoning: “Students can clearly and precisely construct viable arguments to support their own reasoning and to critique the reasoning of others.”

Claim #4 – Modeling and Data Analysis: “Students can analyze complex, real-world scenarios and can construct and use mathematical models to interpret and solve problems.”

The test will be administered entirely on the computer and will use several different response types in order to provide an overall score on each of the four mathematical claims. These include multiple choice with one correct response and constructed response where students are asked to show their work and explain their thinking (similar to what students have done on CMT). In addition to these types of responses, students will be asked to respond to multiple choice problems that have more than one correct response. They will have two part multiple choice problems, and may be asked to fill in tables, drag and drop numbers into tables or graphs, fill in a table, and create graphs.

In English/Language Arts, there are also four claims:

Claim #1 – Reading: “Students can read closely and analytically to comprehend a range of increasingly complex literary and informational texts.”

Claim #2 – Writing: “Students can produce effective writing for a range of purposes and audiences.”

Claim #3 – Listening: “Students can employ effective listening skills for a range of purposes and audiences.”

Claim #4 – Research: “Students can engage in research/inquiry to investigate topics, and to analyze, integrate, and present information.”

In reading, students will be asked to read literary texts (such as short stories or poetry) as well as informational texts (such as speeches, historical documents, science articles, etc.). They will be expected to answer multiple choice questions with a single correct response, multiple choice questions with more than one correct response, and open-ended questions which will require them to support their answers with evidence from the text.

In writing students will be asked to do one “brief write” consisting of one to three paragraphs in response to a prompt that may be either narrative, informative/explanatory, or opinion/argumentative in nature. The form of the writing will vary from student to student, making it imperative that our students have exposure to and practice with all forms of writing. Also included in the writing assessment will be revision items and editing items. Revising includes adding, deleting, substituting, or rearranging material within a piece of writing. Editing involves an understanding of the conventions of writing – spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar.

The listening portion of the assessment involves listening to a short passage (about one or two minutes in length) and then responding to three questions. Students can view the questions first and have the ability to stop the recording and replay all or part of it. The questions will consist of multiple choice with a single correct response, multiple-choice followed by a short constructed response where student provide evidence to support their choices, and multiple-choice with more than one correct response.

A performance task is used to measure Claim #4, Research. For this portion of the assessment, students will participate in a short whole class activity to build background knowledge and engagement. The next day students will engage with several informational articles or excerpts from research sources of various academic disciplines. Students will be asked to analyze the sources, evaluate sources for reliability and validity, and use evidence to support opinions, conjectures, arguments, etc. Ultimately, the students will be asked to produce a longer piece of writing in which they will support their opinions or make a strong argument using evidence from their research. This piece will be evaluated on the strength of the evidence, the organization of the writing, and on the student's use of appropriate spelling, punctuation, capitalization, and grammar.

Districts have not been given information about the level of reporting we can expect in terms of scores. We may receive scores at the student level, the grade level, the school level, or merely at the district level. Once the state provides us with more specific information about what data we will be given, we will forward that information to parents.

Should you wish to experience the new assessments, you may take the practice test online at the following website: <http://sbac.portal.airast.org/practice-test/>