#1. It’s a New Test – Junior High and High School

As we move into spring, we are nearing the time when students will participate in the annual state test.

This year, teachers at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_[Name of School] are facilitating students’ learning and presenting course information in new ways. We are focusing on the development of higher-order thinking skills through challenging tasks that require students to provide reasoning, support arguments with evidence drawn from complex texts, and persevere in solving problems. These are the skills that colleges and employers have cited as necessary for success.

And now, we are participating in a new statewide test that measures these skills and provides us with information to help improve teaching practices and target learning.

The test is different from past testing in many ways. Some highlights include:

* Computer Based: Some questions are interactive, and a greater variety of supporting tools can be provided to eligible students, such as magnification of text, and text-to-speech read-aloud of questions.
* Computer Adaptive: Students receive test questions that provide unique information about what they know and can do. A correct answer is followed by a more difficult question, and an incorrect answer is followed by an easier question. This provides a more precise estimate of student understanding.
* Realistic Context for Tasks: Knowledge is assessed in context—for example, students are asked to select a word of the same meaning to replace a word in a paragraph, rather than to choose a synonym for a word standing alone. In addition, students will need to provide open-ended answers for some questions, rather than selecting from multiple options, and will be asked to write short essays that will need to be scored by hand.
* No Time Limits: Students can take the time they need to do their best.

Check in with your child after he or she has completed testing, and ask him or her to share with you some of their experiences with this new approach.#1. It’s a New Test—Elementary

As we move into spring, we are nearing the time when students will participate in the annual state test.

This year, teachers at \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_[Name of School] are facilitating students’ learning and presenting information in new ways. We are focusing on the development of thinking skills through grade-level-appropriate, but challenging, tasks that require students to explain their thinking, to identify sentences in a text that support their answer choice, and to persevere in solving problems. These are the critical thinking skills that colleges and employers have cited as necessary for success.

And now, we are participating in a new statewide test that measures these skills and provides us with information to help improve teaching practices and target learning.

The test is different from past testing in many ways. Some highlights include:

* Computer Based: Some questions are interactive, and a greater variety of supporting tools can be provided to eligible students, such as magnification of text, and text-to- speech read-aloud of questions.
* Computer Adaptive: Students receive test questions that provide unique information about what they know and can do. A correct answer is followed by a more difficult question, and an incorrect answer is followed by an easier question. This provides a more precise estimate of student understanding.
* Realistic Context for Tasks: Knowledge is assessed in context—for example, students are asked to select a word of the same meaning to replace a word in a paragraph, rather than to choose a synonym for a word standing alone. In addition, students will need to provide open-ended answers for some questions, rather than selecting from multiple options, and will be asked to write short essays that will need to be scored by hand.
* No Time Limits: Students can take the time they need to do their best.

Check in with your child after he or she has completed testing, and ask him or her to share with you some of their experiences with this new approach. If you are interested in an even closer look, you can take a practice test to sample the new problems and experience the tools that are available to support students. Take a look at the link below:

* [Take a Practice Tes](http://sbac.portal.airast.org/practice-test/)t
* [Computer Adaptive Testing Factsheet](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/10/SmarterBalanced-Adaptive-Software.pdf)

**#2. Classroom Activities—All Levels**

As we move through the administration period for the annual statewide test, your child may be coming home with stories about a part of the test that includes a group activity in the classroom. I’m sure that many of you are thinking, since when has group work been allowed on state tests?

The Smarter Balanced test includes “performance tasks,” extended problem-solving exercises that require students to use multiple skills to demonstrate understanding. Students are provided with articles, text excerpts, videos, or diagrams, and then asked to analyze and synthesize them in order to solve the problem. To help students prepare for these performance tasks, teachers will lead students through a prescribed classroom activity to introduce the students to the vocabulary and context for the task. The activity is solely an orientation, designed to make the topic more familiar and accessible, and it is not scored. To learn more about the Smarter Balanced classroom activities and performance tasks, click the links below:

* [Descriptions of Performance Tasks and Classroom Activities](http://sbac.portal.airast.org/practice-test/resources/#activities)
* [Performance Task Writing Rubrics](http://sbac.portal.airast.org/practice-test/resources/#activities) (view sample tasks, associated classroom activities, and scoring guides at this link).

**#3. Test Results Are** **Not the Only Measure—All Levels**

When making critical decisions in our lives, we usually do not rely on only one set of information. For example, when buying a car, we consider the price of the car, whether we think the car is attractive, the reputation of the car company, advice from owners of similar cars, and a host of other indicators of the car’s quality. Similarly, when assessing what students know and can do, it is important to rely on more than one measure of students’ content knowledge and skills.

Scores for the annual statewide test will soon become available. We will use these scores as just one piece of information. Classroom projects, writing assignments, math exercises, and our own tests given throughout the year all contribute important information as we build a clear picture of how each student is progressing. As you assess your child’s progress, I recommend that you too consider the annual state test scores just one piece of information. Take a look at your child’s classroom accomplishments as well as the scores, and use this complete body of information when helping your child set goals for improvement.

**#4. When the Scores Come This Summer—Elementary & Junior High**

This summer, you will receive your child’s results on the annual statewide test. Given that this year’s test is new, you should consider these results a baseline for marking future growth. As we have discussed in recent newsletters, we are in a transition period—we have identified new skills that students should master, we have been teaching those skills in new and novel ways, and now we are assessing progress with a new test. The scores on this test will not be comparable to last year’s annual test scores, as the old test assessed a different set of skills. Additionally, we have raised expectations for what students should be able to do, so this year’s results may show that fewer students have mastered the desired skills. This is OK because we are headed in the right direction. As students spend more time with the new curriculum, their skills will improve.

When you receive these test results, please support your child in areas that seem to be more challenging, and take time to celebrate all of the different ways in which your child has grown this year. If you have any questions about interpreting the Smarter Balanced Assessment System score report, please feel free to contact me, or look to the following resources for more information:

* [Smarter Balanced Reporting System Overview](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Reporting-) (PDF)
* [Achievement Level Descriptors](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Reporting-ALDs-Final.pdf) (PDF)

**#4. When the Scores Come This Summer—High School : States Using Scores for Placement**

This summer you will receive your child’s results on the annual statewide test. As we have discussed in recent newsletters, we are in a transition period—we have identified new skills that students should master, we have been teaching those skills in new and novel ways, and now we are assessing progress with a new test. The scores on this test will not be comparable to last year’s annual test scores, as the old test assessed a different set of skills. Additionally, we have raised expectations for what students should be able to do, so this year’s results may show that fewer students have mastered the desired skills.

You will receive a score report that describes your child’s achievement based on four levels: Level 1, 2, 3, or 4. Students who score at Level 3 or 4 have demonstrated understanding and abilities to be ready for entry-level, credit-bearing college courses if they continue their progress in 12th grade. Public colleges and universities in our state have agreed to use student scores at levels 3 and 4 as evidence that students are ready for entry-level English and math courses. In most cases, this will eliminate the need for your student to take a placement test when they enter college and will spare them the time and extra expense of taking non-credit catch-up courses. For more information on the colleges in our state that will recognize your child’s score and any additional requirements students must meet in Grade 12, please see [INSERT INFORMATION ON STATE POLICY].

If your child scores at Level 1 or 2, it does not mean that he/she should not attend college. We will work with your student to help him/her make as much progress as possible to be ready. Colleges may require him/her to take a placement test and it is possible that he/she will need to take non-credit courses to catch up on particular knowledge and skills. [IF TRANSITION/READINESS COURSES ARE AVAILABLE, INSERT INFORMATION HERE.] Please do not hesitate to reach out to me or to your child’s counselor to discuss how we can work together to help your child progress.

* [Smarter Balanced Reporting System Overview](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Reporting-) (PDF)
* [Achievement Level Descriptors](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/Reporting-ALDs-Final.pdf) (PDF)

**#4. When the Scores Come This Summer—High School: States Not Using Scores for Placement**

Sometime this summer you will receive your child’s results on the annual statewide test. As we have discussed in recent newsletters, we are in a transition period—we have defined new skills that we believe students should master, we have been teaching those skills in new and novel ways, and now we are assessing progress with a new test. The scores on this test will not be comparable to last year’s annual test scores, as the old test covered a different set of skills. Additionally, we have raised expectations for what students should be able to do, so this year’s results may show that fewer students have mastered the desired skills than we would like.

You will receive a score report that describes your student’s achievement based on four levels: Level 1, 2, 3, or 4. Students who score at Level 3 or 4 have demonstrated understanding and abilities to be ready to be successful in entry-level, credit-bearing college courses if they continue their progress in 12th grade.

If your student scores at Level 1 or 2, it does not mean that they should not attend college. We will work with your student to help them make as much progress as possible to be ready. [IF TRANSITION/ READINESS COURSES ARE AVAILABLE, INSERT INFORMATION HERE.] Colleges may require them to take a placement test when they enter and it is possible that they will need to take non-credit courses to catch up on particular knowledge and skills. Please do not hesitate to reach out to me or to your student’s counselor to discuss how we can work together to help your student progress.