This spring, students in grades 3-8 and 11 will take the online Smarter Balanced Assessments in English-language arts and mathematics. Students in grades 5, 8 and 10 will also take paper-and-pencil science tests. In the next few years, science tests will also be online, and tests in history/social science, art, and technology will be added.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subject Area</th>
<th>Grades Tested</th>
<th>Test Type</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>English-language Arts</td>
<td>Grades 3-8 and 11</td>
<td>Computer-adaptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mathematics</td>
<td>Grades 3-8 and 11</td>
<td>Computer-adaptive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Science</td>
<td>Grades 5, 8 and 10</td>
<td>Paper and Pencil</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Some students will take the CAA online subjects tests, which replace the CAPA

The state’s testing program is designed to give information to teachers, students and families about what students know and are able to do and whether they are on track for success in college and careers when they graduate. Test results will help identify and address gaps in knowledge or skills early on so students get the support they need.

New Standards Require New Tests
California’s new Common Core State Standards set higher expectations for our students than ever before. They represent the skills that today’s students need to succeed in college, careers and life -- critical thinking, problem solving and strong writing. Measuring these skills requires different types of test questions.

Test Results Will Be Reported This Spring
Last year, students in California participated in a field test of the Smarter Balanced Assessments. The field tests gave students and their teachers a chance to try out the new testing system. Because last year’s field test was a “test of the test,” results were not given for individual students, classrooms or schools. This is the first year that results will be available for teachers, students and families.

Results Set New Baseline for Student Achievement
Results from the new tests are measured differently and cannot be compared to results from the previous Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) program. The tests measure different things in different ways. Comparing results would be like comparing apples to oranges. Think of this year as hitting the reset button: Results will set a new starting point for student achievement, against which we can compare performance for years to come.

Preparing and Supporting Your Child*
- Discuss the new tests with your child. Make sure he or she is not scared or anxious going into the new tests.
- With older children, explain that the new tests were created to help him or her better prepare for college and career.
- Explain to your child that the new tests will be more challenging the first few times they take them.
- Tell your child that you and his or her teacher have high expectations and that you are both there to help them every step of the way.
- Review test results with your child, bringing your child’s teacher into the discussion as necessary.
- Make sure your child gets a good night’s sleep and a nutritious breakfast before testing.
New Test Results Are Just One Measure
You receive information about how your child is doing in school through grades on tests and classroom assignments, as well as by talking with your child’s teacher. The new test results will give you another piece of information about how well your child is learning and how well your child is doing compared to other students in the same grade. Think of the test results as one part of an academic “wellness” check for your child.

Online Tests Engage Students and Provide Personalized Experiences
The online tests give students many new and different types of questions. For some of the math questions, for example, your child might be asked to drag and drop things from one place on the screen to another or draw a graph to solve a problem. Taking the tests online also allows students to use different tools that they might need like a calculator on some math problems, a glossary when taking the reading part of the test, or a highlighter that they can use to highlight important parts of a long paragraph.

These online tests are “computer-adaptive,” meaning the difficulty level of questions is adjusted based on the answers that students give. Unlike paper-and-pencil exams, online tests give different testing experiences for every student. This feature increases student engagement, shortens the testing time for many students and provides more accurate results.

Testing Schedule
Most schools will test their students between the middle of March and the middle of May. You will receive additional information from your school about the specific days and times of testing.

SCUSD is Prepared
Sacramento City Unified staff and students have been preparing for the new CAASPP testing program since Common Core was adopted by the State Board of Education in 2010:
  • Schools have been upgraded to wireless networks with greater capacity
  • All schools have computers for testing, including carts of Apple MacBook Air laptops
  • Teachers have been trained in the Common Core standards
  • New books and other materials have been purchased to help teachers with instruction
  • Students have been trying out the new questions by taking practice tests
  • Last year’s district-wide field test helped the district work out the bugs and get ready for this spring

For More Information
Practice tests are available at http://www.scusd.edu/practicetest. The practice tests can be taken by parents, teachers, students, and others and will give information about the type of test questions that students will see in different grades and subject areas.


This Guide was developed by the Center for Student Assessment and Program Accountability at the Sacramento County Office of Education for use by schools and school districts in communicating with their families about state testing in spring 2015.