

Myths and Facts on the Smarter Balanced Assessment (SBAC)

Myth: The SBAC is not beneficial to students and Connecticut does not need the assessment.

Fact: The Smarter Balanced assessment (SBAC) focuses on real world critical-thinking and problem solving skills. The test is administered once a year to students in grades 3-8. At the high school level, starting in 2016, all students will take the SAT in place of the SBAC. Importantly, the SBAC and the new SAT is aligned to the Connecticut Core Standards, which means it helps us all understand how well Connecticut's students are progressing towards this new, higher level of college- and career-ready expectations.ⁱ This shift is necessary to ensure our students are prepared for the technical demands and jobs of an increasingly specialized and global 21st century economy and workforce.

Myth: Changing from the SBAC to a new test will have no fiscal impact on the state.

Fact: Connecticut has already invested millions of dollars into the implementation of the SBAC, along with the costs local districts have incurred to upgrade technology and administer the assessment. Additionally, if Connecticut were to decide to move to another exam, it is likely that the only organizations able to offer a quick turnaround would be a for-profit organization. Any new test would undoubtedly cost the state additional funding that is currently unknown. Furthermore, as regulations for the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) still need to be drafted, there is no indication that a replacement exam would be in compliance with the new federal law.

Myth: Teachers did not have input during development and do not currently support SBAC.

Fact: Thousands of K-12 educators and a handful of higher education faculty from across member states, including over 300 from Connecticut, participated in various aspects of SBAC development, including content choices, test design, and achievement level descriptor (ALD) creation.ⁱⁱ The support and participation of the nation's best teachers helped ensure that SBAC is a better measure of a student's progress than previous state tests.ⁱⁱⁱ

Myth: There are too many tests and too much time is spent on them, resulting in over testing.

Fact: The SBAC is administered one time each year and does not require more time than previous state assessments. On average, the Connecticut Mastery Examination Committee found that the test takes 6.5 hours total, or less than 1% of a school year.^{iv} Any additional testing for students is not driven by *state* test requirements, but rather by additional tests selected and implemented at the *local* level. Further state guidance could aid districts in streamlining and minimizing locally selected assessments. The newly passed Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) will enable states to use federal funding to help districts reduce the number of assessments while maintaining certain high-quality assessments.^v

Myth: SBAC is a high stakes test that causes undue stress on students.

Fact: SBAC is not high stakes and there are no consequences for students taking the assessment. Moreover, SBAC was designed to be only one of multiple measures of student achievement and school quality. The test is not currently linked to the teacher evaluation system, and unlike No Child Left Behind (NCLB), schools do not automatically “fail” if the minimum for test participation is not met.^{vi}

Myth: The computer adaptive testing format is inappropriate for students.

Fact: Children are using technology more today than any prior generation. Districts across Connecticut have invested in ensuring children have access to the technology needed to administer the SBAC on computers. The SBAC is a computer-adaptive test designed to tailor to individual student’s levels through its responsive design. As a student answers a question, the test adjusts the level of difficulty of the next set of questions in real time, thereby providing a more accurate picture of a student’s areas of content-mastery and areas for growth.^{vii} This feature provides educators more accurate information about the learning gaps and gains of their students and requires less test-taking time. The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium’s [fact sheet on adaptive testing](#) outlines how the software works and how it better evaluates student performance.

Myth: SBAC and the Common Core State Standards are not supported by research.

Fact: The Common Core State Standards and aligned assessments were developed from a large and growing body of evidence on ways to improve student achievement, including extensive scholarly research; surveys on what skills are required of students entering college and workforce training programs; assessment data identifying college- and career-ready performance; and comparisons to standards from high-performing states and nations.^{viii}

Myth: Individual student SBAC scores will become public information.

Fact: The Connecticut State Department of Education (SDE) does not release individual student data publicly, does not send student level data to the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium or federal government, and does not collect any new data as a result of SBAC. Additionally, the SDE is required to comply with all federal laws, including the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), state statutes, and guidelines to protect confidential data. The Department of Education’s [FAQ on student data privacy](#) outlines its strict procedures to protect student data privacy.

Myth: SBAC is unfair and does not accommodate English Language Learners (ELL) and students with disabilities.

Fact: SBAC was developed to enable all students to demonstrate what they know and can do, including those with visual, auditory, and/or physical access barriers.^{ix} National experts in English Language Learner and bilingual education assessment and experts focusing on learning disabilities and assistive technology provided feedback to SBAC.^x There are a host of accommodations available through the online computer platform and at the school level.^{xi} In fact, there are more accommodations available for SBAC than for previous state assessments.^{xii}

Endnotes

ⁱ Conn. State Dept. of Educ., Connecticut Administration of the SAT: Frequently Asked Questions for Superintendents, 2015, http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/student_assessment/sat/sat_faqs_superintendents.pdf.

ⁱⁱ Conn. State Bd. of Educ., Connecticut Smarter Balanced Interpretive Guide, 2015, http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/student_assessment/smarter_balanced/reporting/connecticut_smarter_balanced_interpretive_guide_2015.pdf.

ⁱⁱⁱ Nat'l Network of State Teachers of the Year, The Right Trajectory: State Teachers of the Year Compare Former and New State Assessments, Nov. 2015, <http://www.nnstoy.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Right-Trajectory-FINAL.pdf>.

^{iv} Conn. State Dept. of Educ., Smarter Balanced Assessments Testing Times, Dec. 2015, http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/curriculum/mastery_examination_committee/mastery_examination_committee_121415/connecticut_sb_testing_time.pdf.

^v United States Dep't of Educ., Every Student Succeeds Act Guidance, Feb. 2016, <http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/16-0002signedcsso222016ltr.pdf>.

^{vi} Educ. Week, Ed. Dept. Gives States Guidance On How to Pare Back, Improve Tests, Feb. 2016, http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/campaign-k-12/2016/02/ed_dept_gives_states_ideas_on_.html.

^{vii} Conn. State Bd. of Educ., Connecticut Smarter Balanced Interpretive Guide, 2015, http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/student_assessment/smarter_balanced/reporting/connecticut_smarter_balanced_interpretive_guide_2015.pdf.

^{viii} Conn. State Dept. of Educ., Myths v. Facts About the Common Core Standards, [http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/student_assessment/smarter_balanced/alw/corefacts\[1\].pdf](http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/student_assessment/smarter_balanced/alw/corefacts[1].pdf).

^{ix} Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, Accessibility and Accommodations Fact Sheet, July 2012, http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/07/SmarterBalanced_Accessibility_Factsheet.pdf.

^x Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, Advisory Committees, <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/about/advisory-committees/>.

^{xi} Conn. State Dept. of Educ., Assessment Guidelines, 2015-2016, http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/student_assessment/special_education/AssessmentGuideline.pdf.

^{xii} Conn. State Dept. of Educ., Assessment Guidelines, 2012-2013, http://www.sde.ct.gov/sde/lib/sde/pdf/student_assessment/special_education/AssessmentGuideline.pdf.