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High School Smarter Balanced Assessment in 9th Grade: FAQ

For the past three years, in 3rd-8th grades and again in 11th grade, students in Vermont have taken the Smarter Balanced assessments for math and English language arts, sometimes referred to as SBACs. Federal law, Every Student Succeeds Act, requires all students to be tested in math and English language arts in 3rd-8th grades and one time in high school.

Starting this school year, we will assess students in 9th grade instead of 11th. There will be no changes to Smarter Balanced assessments at other grades.

Below you will find answers to many of the questions teachers, administrators, students, and parents have asked about this change.

Why is Vermont changing its high school assessment to 9th grade from 11th grade?

There are three main reasons for this change. First, 11th grade is already a very heavily tested academic year. In addition to a standardized science assessment taken by all students, many 11th graders are also taking the PSAT, PACT, SAT, and ACT assessments. Many more are taking one or more Advanced Placement (AP) or International Baccalaureate (IB) assessments. Changing the Smarter Balanced high school assessment grade from 11th-9th will relieve some of this burden.

Second, by assessing in 9th grade, rather than in 10th or 12th grades, we will be able to track year-to-year student growth over seven consecutive years and include the results as part of the assessment system at the high school level. This would not be possible if the assessment occurred in 10th or 12th grades as the assessments will not be in consecutive academic years.

Finally, by giving the assessment at the beginning of the high school years, rather than near the end, the test results will help schools identify students who will need intervention and support to become career and college ready upon graduation.

When will this move happen?

The move to 9th grade will occur this school year. In the spring 2018 testing window, 9th graders will take the Smarter Balanced assessments and 11th graders will not.

Will the 9th grade Smarter Balanced Assessment be identical to the test currently taken in 11th grade?

It will be similar, but not identical. The format will be the same. It is a computer adaptive test aligned with the Common Core State Standards; however, the questions themselves are mostly different. Most of the test questions that will be used were field-tested with 9th grade students. The remainder have been judged by content experts to be appropriate for 9th grade students. The cut scores used to determine if students are meeting achievement standards are also being set specifically for 9th grade. To be clear, we are not moving the 11th grade test items to 9th grade. Rather, we are developing new Smarter Balanced assessments appropriate for 9th grade students.

Does this mean that the only assessment of student performance in high school is in 9th grade?

No. Further career and college ready indicators are included under the new state accountability model. By the time a student graduates from high school, s/he is expected to have a proficient score on **one** of a number of potential measures, including SAT, AP, dual enrollment, or an industry recognized certificate. Please follow this [link](#) for a full list of approved measures.

What should we do to prepare for the change?

The administration of the Smarter Balanced assessments will be identical to previous years, with the exception of the grade level taking the assessment. Please consider any changes to class schedules required to ensure space is available for 9th graders to take the test, that a sufficient number of computers are available, and that staff are trained in the proper administration of the test. However, the best way to prepare for the assessments is to align curriculum and instruction to the Common Core State Standards.

Who should I contact with my questions about this change?

- For information about assessment development and administration, contact Michael Hock, Director of Education Assessment, at michael.hock@vermont.gov.