



CONNECTICUT STATE  
DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

# Smarter Balanced in Connecticut: A new starting point for future growth

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## A NEW ROADMAP FOR SUPPORTING STUDENT SUCCESS

We owe it to our kids to make sure that they receive an education that prepares them to thrive in a global economy and civic life. That's why Connecticut raised the bar and issued a new instructional roadmap that will prepare our kids for college and careers. Our new roadmap, the Connecticut Core Standards, sets learning expectations for what students should know and be able to do at each grade level so that by the time they graduate from high school, they are ready to succeed in college and the workplace.

## A NEW RULER FOR MEASURING STUDENT SUCCESS

New standards require a new state test to measure progress toward these new learning goals. In 2014–15, the Smarter Balanced assessments replaced our old state tests, the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) for Grades 3–8 and the Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) for Grade 11, in English language arts and math.

## REAL-WORLD SKILLS

The Connecticut Core Standards focus on critical thinking and problem solving—the real-world skills students need to be successful in college and careers. The Smarter Balanced assessments are administered on computers and are designed to measure these skills through reading comprehension, writing, and math questions that require students to demonstrate that they truly understand the content—not just fill in a bubble. Smarter Balanced will help parents and teachers better understand how the student is progressing, revealing where the student is excelling and where the student needs extra help.

## BACKGROUND ON SMARTER BALANCE ASSESSMENTS

In 2010, Connecticut joined the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and partnered with other states to develop the Smarter Balanced Assessment System. As a governing state in the consortium, Connecticut educators have been actively involved in many aspects of this new assessment system, including item development, standard setting, report development, and creation of professional learning resources for teachers.

In spring 2014, educators in nearly 90 percent of Connecticut's school districts successfully implemented a large-scale field test of new assessment items and the accompanying technology. Over the past two

years, thousands of Connecticut educators have also participated in important professional learning activities.

## STATEWIDE PICTURE

In 2015, the Smarter Balanced tests replaced the old state tests, the Connecticut Mastery Test (CMT) and Connecticut Academic Performance Test (CAPT) in both ELA and math for students in Grades 3-8 and 11 statewide. In total, approximately 267,000 students took the Smarter Balanced exams in 2015, the first operational year of the new state assessments. In 2014, about 90 percent of school districts administered the Smarter Balanced field test in lieu of the CMT and CAPT tests.

### English language arts: 2015 statewide results by grade and level

Grade	% at Level 1: Does Not Meet the Achievement Level	% at Level 2: Approaching the Achievement Level	% at Level 3: Meets the Achievement Level	% at Level 4: Exceeds the Achievement Level	% at Levels 3 & 4: Meets or Exceeds the Achievement Level
3	23.0%	23.3%	23.9%	29.7%	<b>53.6%</b>
4	25.7%	19.3%	24.3%	30.7%	<b>55.0%</b>
5	22.5%	18.9%	32.7%	25.8%	<b>58.5%</b>
6	19.3%	25.1%	35.0%	20.5%	<b>55.6%</b>
7	21.1%	21.8%	38.8%	18.3%	<b>57.1%</b>
8	19.9%	26.1%	37.1%	17.0%	<b>54.0%</b>
11	22.1%	24.5%	32.3%	21.1%	<b>53.4%</b>
State	<b>21.9%</b>	<b>22.7%</b>	<b>32.1%</b>	<b>23.3%</b>	<b>55.4%</b>

### Mathematics: 2015 statewide results by grade and level

Grade	% at Level 1: Does Not Meet the Achievement Level	% at Level 2: Approaching the Achievement Level	% at Level 3: Meets the Achievement Level	% at Level 4: Exceeds the Achievement Level	% at Levels 3 & 4: Meets or Exceeds the Achievement Level
3	27.0%	25.0%	29.7%	18.3%	<b>48.0%</b>
4	22.9%	32.9%	27.4%	16.8%	<b>44.2%</b>
5	33.1%	30.0%	19.2%	17.7%	<b>36.9%</b>
6	31.3%	31.4%	21.1%	16.3%	<b>37.3%</b>
7	31.5%	29.8%	22.1%	16.7%	<b>38.8%</b>
8	37.1%	26.1%	18.9%	18.0%	<b>36.8%</b>
11	46.3%	23.2%	18.9%	11.6%	<b>30.6%</b>
State	<b>32.4%</b>	<b>28.5%</b>	<b>22.5%</b>	<b>16.6%</b>	<b>39.1%</b>

A complete listing of statewide, district and school results can be found:

<http://www.ct.gov/sde/SettingtheBaseline2015>.

Students are still administered the CMT Science in Grade 5 and 8 and the CAPT Science in Grade 10 in compliance with federal and state law. Compared with last year, each grade dipped slightly compared to 2014.

- In Grade 5, 79 percent of students performed at proficient, while 56 percent of students performed at Goal.
- In Grade 8, 77 percent of students performed at proficient, while 61 percent of students performed at Goal.
- In Grade 10, 78 percent of students performed at proficient, while 45 percent of students performed at Goal.

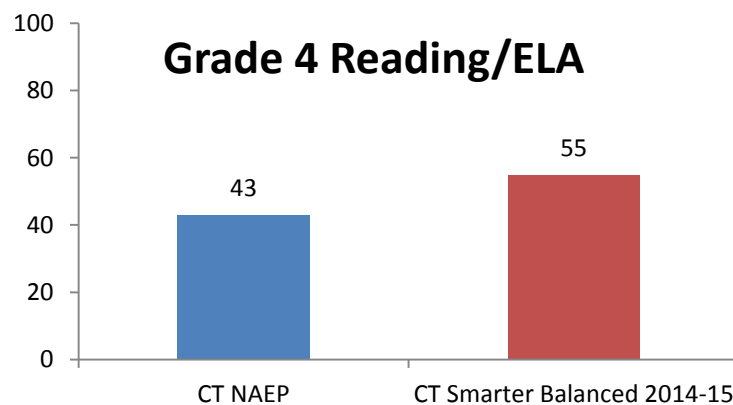
For a complete listing of all district and school 2015 CMT Science and CAPT Science results, please visit:

[www.ctreports.com](http://www.ctreports.com).

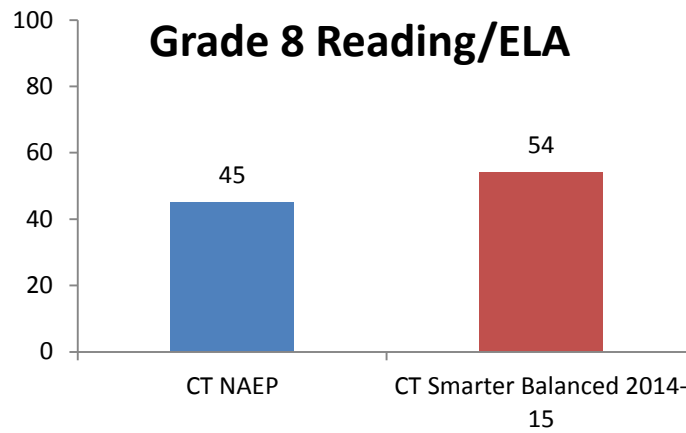
## **BRIGHT SPOTS**

With the expectation that scores would drop, the SDE anticipated that statewide results would largely mirror performance on the 2012–13 National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), nationwide exams considered by some to be the gold-standard for testing. Preliminary analysis of the scores revealed some bright spots.

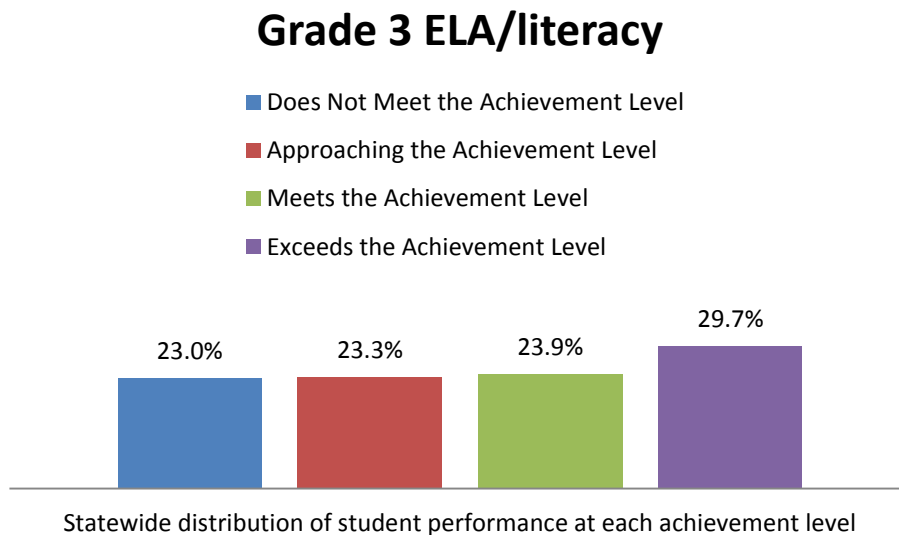
Connecticut’s results show that this year’s English language arts results beat expectations significantly. In Grade 4, 43 percent of students met the 2013 NAEP reading proficiency standard, whereas 55 percent of fourth-graders met or exceeded the achievement level in ELA on the 2015 Smarter Balanced exam.



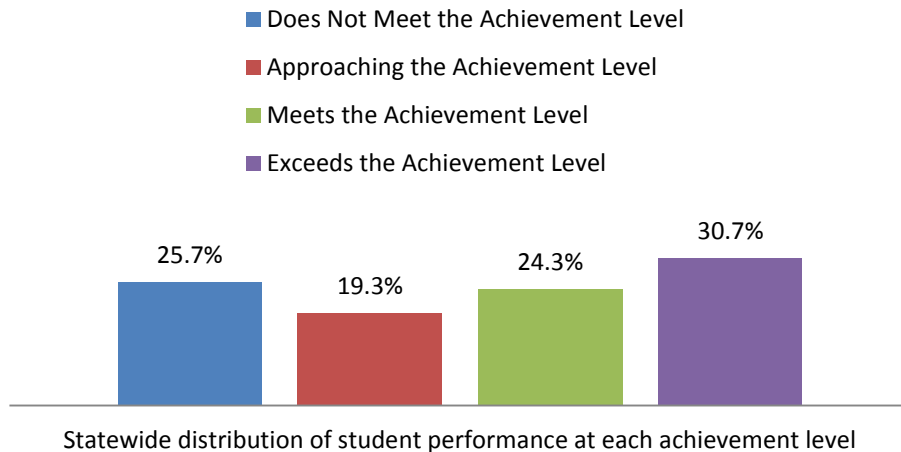
In Grade 8, 45 percent of students met the 2013 NAEP reading proficiency standard, whereas 54 percent of eighth-graders met or exceeded the achievement level in ELA on the 2015 Smarter Balanced exam.



The performance of the state’s youngest readers emerged as a bright spot in the 2015 statewide Smarter Balanced results. More third- and fourth-graders, 29.7 percent and 30.7 percent, respectively, performed within the top level, “Level 4: Exceeds the achievement level,” than performed within any of the other three individual levels.



## Grade 4 ELA/literacy



Two Alliance District high schools emerged as bright spots of the 2015 Smarter Balanced administration. As schools accelerated into the higher, more rigorous material, Bloomfield High School and New London High School continued to build upon their school improvements and exited their status as turnaround schools, which represent the lowest performing 5 percent of schools in the state.

### THE NEW BASELINE

Given that the new exams test different content and skills than the state's old exams tested, the scores cannot be compared. With the new tests, students will receive new scores. As expected, results look different from scores under the old assessment system.

This does not mean that students are learning less. Rather, it reflects that the bar was set higher.

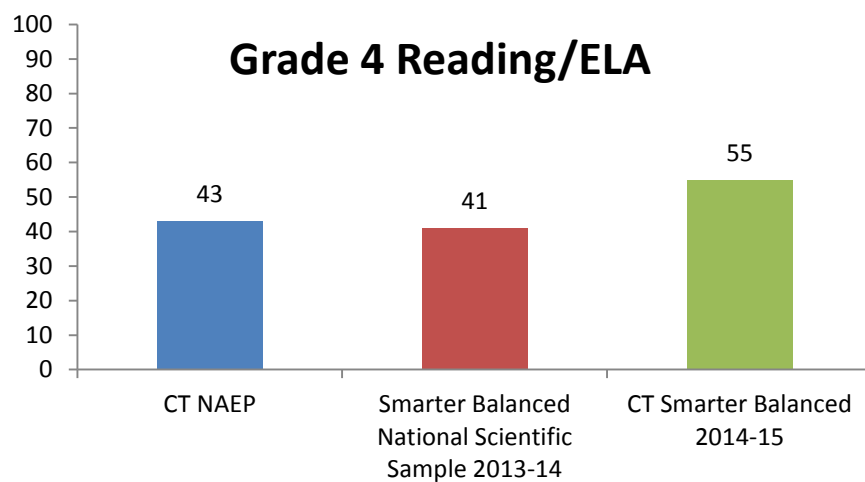
The Connecticut Core Standards and the Smarter Balanced assessments were informed by the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP). Known as the "nation's report card," NAEP is the largest nationally representative and continuing assessment of students' knowledge in reading and math on a state-by-state basis. Proficient performance (level 3 of 4) on the NAEP is indicative of "competency over challenging subject matter."

It was expected that the 2015 statewide results would be similar to state results on NAEP. Students outperformed these early estimates in English language arts, but fared as anticipated in math.

Overall, the results do reveal similarities between the Smarter Balanced and NAEP performance at or above level 3. This is not surprising because Smarter Balanced was informed by NAEP; NAEP items were included in the Smarter Balanced field test; and student responses to the NAEP items were viewed alongside performance on field test items as part of achievement level setting.

Figures 1 through 4 above present the best available data in Grades 4 and 8 in mathematics and ELA/literacy across several assessments<sup>1</sup>. Besides the percentage of students across the Smarter Balanced states<sup>2</sup> performing at or above level 3 on the Smarter Balanced field test, the figures also include:

- the percentage of public school students in consortia states scoring at or above Level 3: Meets Grade Level Standards on the Smarter Balanced field test in 2013–14 based on scientific national sample;
- the percentage of Connecticut public school students scoring at or above NAEP “proficient” in 2012–13; and
- the percentage of students scoring at or above the Smarter Balanced Level 3: Meets Grade Level Standards in 2014–15.

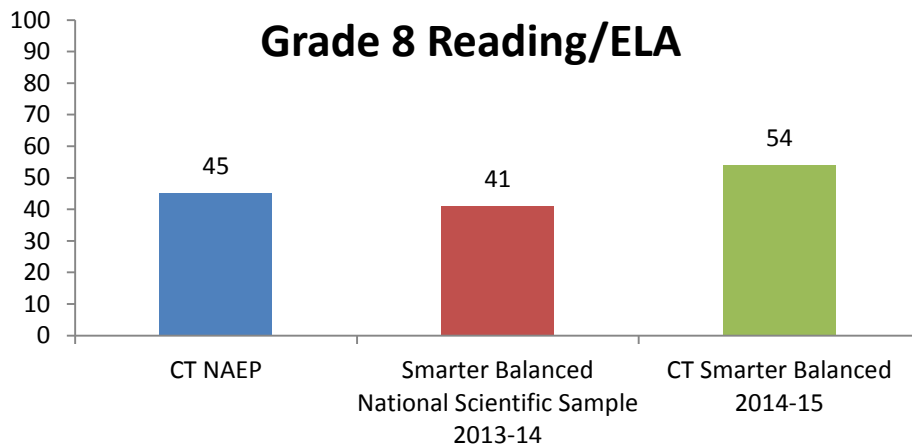


This graph illustrates the similarities between the Smarter Balanced and NAEP performance at or above level 3 in Grade 4 reading.

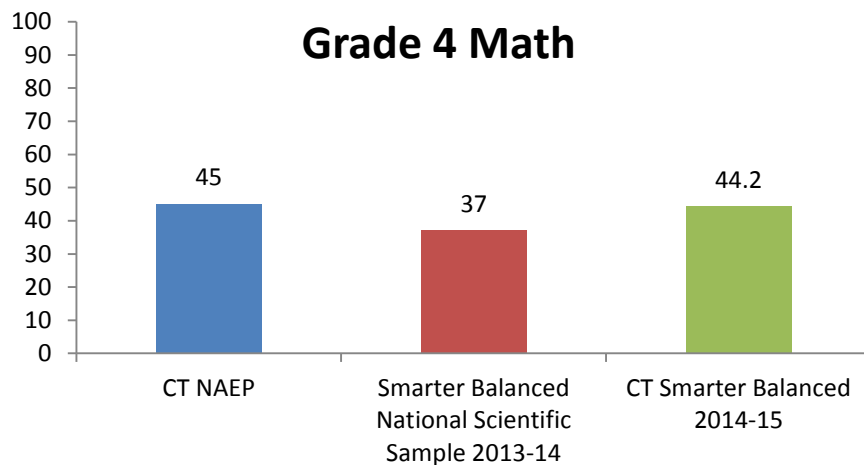
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1. The comparative information provided here is purely informational; it would be inappropriate to draw definitive conclusions from these data. Moreover, given that these assessments were developed separately, are based on different content standards, are administered differently, and have dramatically different stakes for students and schools, strict point-by-point comparisons should not be made.

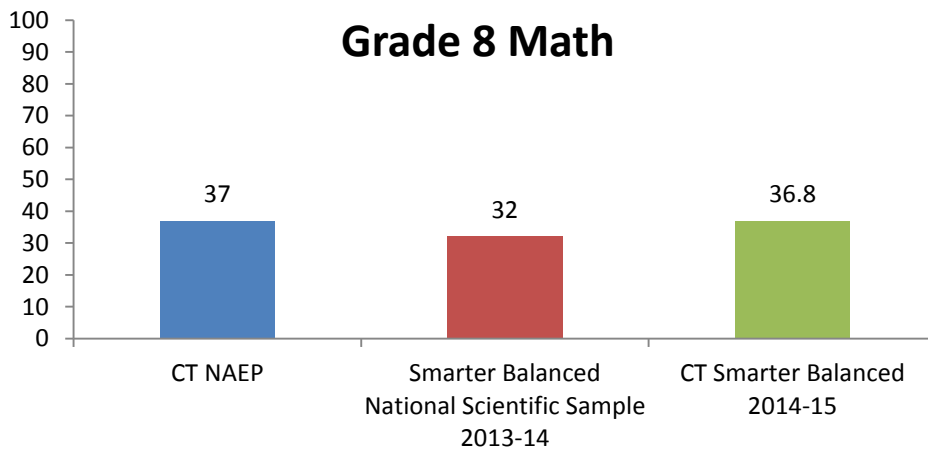
2. The states and U.S. territories that make up the Smarter Balanced consortium are: California, Connecticut, Delaware, Hawaii, Idaho, Michigan, Montana, Nevada, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Oregon, South Dakota, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, U.S. Virgin Islands, Vermont, Washington, and West Virginia. Iowa, North Carolina, and Wyoming are affiliate members.



This graph illustrates the similarities between the Smarter Balanced and NAEP performance at or above level 3 in Grade 8 reading.



This graph illustrates the similarities between the Smarter Balanced and NAEP performance at or above level 3 in Grade 4 mathematics.



This graph illustrates the similarities between the Smarter Balanced and NAEP performance at or above level 3 in Grade 8 mathematics.

## **BUILDING UPON THE NEW BASELINE: AREAS FOR GROWTH**

It is critical to recognize that Connecticut's ELA/literacy and mathematics achievement results in 2014–15 will represent a new baseline for performance in those subject areas. The reason is that the results will be based on the first administration of a completely new state assessment that is aligned to new, more rigorous standards. The achievement results for 2014–15 reflect a change in expectations for what students should know and be able to do, not a change in their abilities.

Beyond 2015, in addition to measuring achievement annually, it will be equally—if not more important—to measure growth in student achievement from this new baseline. Together, measures of annual achievement and growth will more fully reflect students' progress toward fulfillment of the promise of college and career readiness. These measures will also acknowledge the efforts of Connecticut educators who have been working tirelessly over the past few years to implement the Connecticut Core Standards.

Math scores matched the state's estimates. Nonetheless, as a starting point to spearhead the state's efforts to improve supports in math, Commissioner Wentzell announced that she will convene educators, industry and business leaders, and experts in math and STEM instruction on a Commissioner's Council on Mathematics. This group will be charged with identifying best practices, both in Connecticut and across the nation, and to explore promising innovations in the area of math and science instruction.

Secondly, the SDE plans to intensify supports to math teachers. The new academic standards, the Connecticut Core Standards, represent a significant shift in what students should know and be able to do in the subject. To date, the SDE has sponsored training for thousands of Connecticut educators. In the coming year, the SDE will continue to offer quality professional development opportunities for educators who teach math. In addition, the SDE will explore other, innovative professional learning opportunities to strengthen supports for Connecticut's math educators.

Further analysis of the 2015 Smarter Balanced results reveals achievement gaps among high-needs students' performance when compared to their peers—ones that must be closed. The high-needs group represents a super subgroup of all low-income students, English learners (ELs), and students with disabilities (SWD) in Connecticut. A high concentration of high-needs students attends schools in Alliance Districts.

Of all the high-needs students in Connecticut, only 30.6 percent are meeting or exceeding the achievement standards (Level 3) in ELA, whereas 74.9 percent of all their non-high-needs peers are meeting or exceeding the achievement standard in ELA. In math, only 16.4 percent of high-needs students statewide are meeting or exceeding the achievement standards (Level 3), whereas 57 percent of all their non-high-needs peers are meeting or exceeding the achievement standard.

The Alliance District program is the state's lead initiative to improve student success in the state's 30 most chronically struggling school districts and to help close achievement gaps. The program provides greater resources in exchange for greater accountability to ensure that students, who need the most help, get the assistance they need. Since its creation in 2012, the Alliance District program has invested a total of \$407 million in Connecticut's high-needs school districts.



The best way to support improvement in student performance is through rich, engaging instruction—not by practicing the Smarter Balanced exam. Proven intervention strategies will also benefit students who do not meet the achievement level (Level 1). To better support and strengthen districts' implementation of quality intervention systems, the CSDE will be refreshing the state's guidelines for Scientific Research Based Interventions (SRBI), a proven tiered intervention system.