

## Background

To be ready for college and careers, students need to master skills such as critical thinking, analytical writing, and problem solving. The Smarter Balanced assessments have been specifically developed to measure these real-world skills. These new tests will give parents and teachers accurate information on where students stand on their path to success.

## Achievement Levels

The Smarter Balanced members have approved recommendations on four “achievement levels” that help to describe student performance on the new assessments. The achievement levels describe how well students have mastered the standards and the extent to which they are on track for entry-level college courses or postsecondary career education and training. Students who score at achievement level 3 or above demonstrate that they are on track for eventual college and career readiness.

The achievement levels serve as a starting point for discussion about the performance of individual students and of groups of students in mathematics and English Language arts. There are other measures that students, teachers and parents can also use to help evaluate the academic progress of students and schools, such as test scale scores, class grades, and portfolios of student work.

Each state can determine the particular language used for the four achievement levels, but they have the same basic meaning:

Level 4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Exceeds grade-level performance standard</li><li>• Advanced progress toward college and career readiness</li></ul>
Level 3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Meets grade-level performance standard</li><li>• Progress toward college and career readiness</li></ul>
Level 2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Nearly meets grade-level performance standard</li><li>• May require further development</li></ul>
Level 1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Does not meet grade-level performance standard</li><li>• Needs substantial improvement</li></ul>

The threshold scores for each achievement level were developed using a highly inclusive, multi-step process:

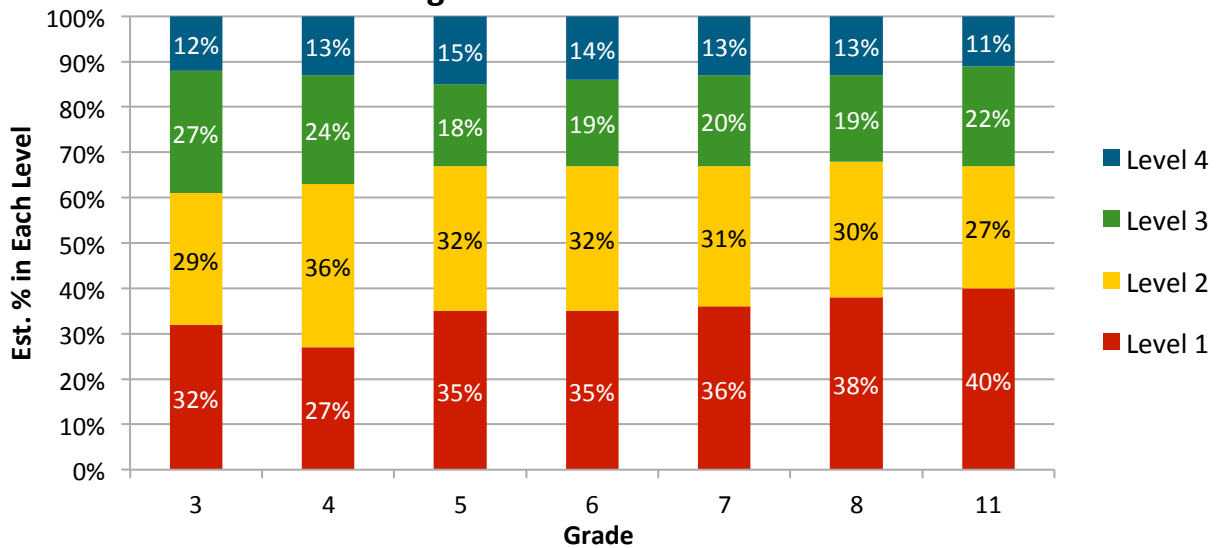
- Approximately 200 educators spent a week writing detailed descriptors for each achievement level.
- An in-person panel composed of close to 500 educators, higher education faculty, parents, and business and community leaders nominated by Consortium members went through assessment questions at each grade level and recommended where to set the achievement levels based on those detailed achievement descriptors. The panel included teachers of students with disabilities and English language learners to ensure the new levels are fair and appropriate for all students.

- An online panel opened the doors to the process to all who wanted to be part of this important effort.
- The recommendations of both the in-person and online groups were reviewed by a “cross-grade” review committee that ensured that the achievement levels align appropriately across grades 3 through 8 and 11.

### Performance Estimates

In spring 2014, 4.2 million students from 21 states and the U.S. Virgin Islands participated in the Smarter Balanced field test. These charts show the estimated percentage of students scoring at each achievement level on those field tests in mathematics and English language arts/literacy.

**Mathematics: Estimated Percentage of Students Scoring at Each Achievement Level**



**English Language Arts/Literacy: Estimated Percentage of Students Scoring at Each Achievement Level**

