Educational standards describe what students should know and be able to do in each subject in each grade. In California, the State Board of Education decides on the standards for all students, from kindergarten through high school. The California Department of Education helps schools make sure that all students are meeting the standards.

Since 2010, 45 states have adopted the same standards for English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. These standards are called the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Having the same standards helps all students get a good education, even if they change schools or move to a different state. Teachers, parents, and education experts designed the CCSS to prepare students for success in college and the workplace. Visit the Common Core website at http://www.corestandards.org

The video "A New Foundation for Student Success," commissioned by the Hunt Institute and the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) provides an introduction to the Common Core State Standards, including a brief history. Watch the video at: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9lGD9oLofks&lr=1
Common Core State Standards in California

In January 2010, Senate Bill 1 from the Fifth Extraordinary Session (SB X5 1) established the Academic Content Standards Commission (ACSC) to develop academic content standards for ELA and mathematics. The ACSC was composed of members appointed by the Governor and the Legislature, the majority of whom were current public school elementary or secondary classroom teachers. The ACSC was authorized to make recommendations to the California State Board of Education (SBE) to approve or disapprove the CCSS, and to supplement those standards with up to 15 percent additional standards. The ACSC met four times in June and July 2010, and provided its recommendations to the SBE on July 15, 2010. The SBE voted unanimously to adopt the recommendations of the ACSC on August 2, 2010.

The California Common Core State Standards can be accessed at: http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/

Additional resources and information are also available at this site.

SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC)

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced) is a state-led consortium working to develop next-generation assessments that measure student progress toward college- and career-readiness. Smarter Balanced is one of two multistate consortia awarded funding from the U.S. Department of Education in 2010 to develop an assessment system aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) by the 2014-15 school year.

The SBAC focus is on assessing students annually in grades three through eight in English-language arts and mathematics and once in grades ten through twelve under current federal requirements. To access information and resources on SBAC visit the California Department of Education web site at: http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/smarterbalanced.asp

A map indicating SBAC member states is located at: http://www.smarterbalanced.org/about/member-states/
By adopting the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), more than 40 states have established clear, consistent expectations for the knowledge and skills students need to succeed in college and the workplace. To help students meet these goals, teachers need new ways to monitor student progress and better tools to meet their unique needs. Smarter Balanced is working with K-12 teachers, administrators, and state policymakers to develop and test a balanced system of assessments that will be implemented in the 2014-15 school year.

The Smarter Balanced approach includes a number of differences from most state assessments today.

- These assessments will be administered online and will go beyond multiple-choice questions to include performance tasks that allow students to demonstrate research, writing, and analytical skills.
- In addition to a year-end test, teachers will be able to administer interim assessments throughout the school year to monitor student progress and make adjustments to instruction.
- Accommodations for students with disabilities and English language learners will be built into the system so that the progress of students can be accurately measured.

An online reporting system will provide clear, easy-to-understand data on student achievement and growth. These reports will present parents, teachers, principals, and other local and state leaders with information they can use to help students make even greater progress.

Digital Library

Smarter Balanced is committed to providing formative resources, tools, and professional learning opportunities for educators to tailor instruction based on student needs. The Digital Library, which is scheduled for release in June 2014, is a critical component of the Smarter Balanced system of
assessments that will include a variety of resources to improve teaching and learning. It is interactive and allows educators from member states to use and rate resources and to collaborate.

Smarter Balanced Practice Test Items are Available

The Smarter Balanced Practice Tests, released on May 29, 2013, are available for grades 3 through 8 and grade 11 in English language arts (ELA) and mathematics. The Practice Tests provide a preview of the Smarter Balanced assessments, but do not reflect the full range of content that students may encounter on the actual assessments. The Practice Tests will help schools prepare for the implementation of the Smarter Balanced Assessment System.

“The release of online Practice Tests reflects the tremendous progress of the state-led effort to develop next-generation assessments,” said Joe Willhoft, Ph.D., executive director of Smarter Balanced. “Available nearly two years before the first administration of the summative assessment, these examples offer schools and districts another resource for professional development and outreach.”

The Practice Tests provide a preview of the types of questions that will be featured in the summative assessment beginning in 2014-15, including selected-response items, constructed-response items, technology-enhanced items, and performance tasks—extended activities that challenge students to apply their knowledge and skills to respond to real-world problems. The Practice Tests are freely available on the Smarter Balanced website located at: http://www.smarterbalanced.org/practice-test/

Computer Adaptive Testing

The Smarter Balanced assessment system will capitalize on the precision and efficiency of computer adaptive testing (CAT) for both the mandatory summative assessment and the optional interim assessments. Based on student responses, the computer program adjusts the difficulty of questions throughout the assessment. For example, a student who
answers a question correctly will receive a more challenging item, while an incorrect answer generates an easier question.

By adapting to the student as the assessment is taking place, these assessments present an individually tailored set of questions to each student and can quickly identify which skills students have mastered. This approach represents a significant improvement over traditional paper-and-pencil assessments used in many states today, providing more accurate scores for all students across the full range of the achievement continuum. For additional information on computer adaptive testing visit the Smarter Balanced website at: http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/computer-adaptive-testing/

Technology Requirements and Specifications

The Smarter Balanced Technology Strategy Framework and System Requirements Specifications provide minimum hardware specifications and basic bandwidth calculations that will allow schools and districts to evaluate which of their existing computers will support the administration of the assessment system in the 2014-15 school year.

The framework was developed with input and feedback from Smarter Balanced member states, work groups, and data from the Technology Readiness Tool, an online inventory of technology resources launched in 2012. Based on the research and data analysis, Smarter Balanced estimates that the majority of schools and districts in member states will be able to successfully administer the assessments with their existing infrastructure.

The requirements apply only to the Smarter Balanced assessments and should not be considered minimum specifications to support instruction, which may require additional technology. In addition, all hardware choices should consider the individual needs of students. Some students may need hardware that exceeds these minimum guidelines, and some students may require qualitatively different hardware.

http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/technology/#specifications
Sample Items and Performance Tasks

Smarter Balanced sample items illustrate the rigor and complexity of the English language arts/literacy and mathematics items and performance tasks students will encounter on the Consortium’s next-generation assessments.

The sample items and performance tasks are intended to help teachers, administrators, and policymakers implementing the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) and preparing for next-generation assessments. They provide an early look into the depth of understanding of the CCSS that will be measured by the Smarter Balanced assessment system. While the items and tasks are not intended to be used as sample tests, educators can use them to begin planning the shifts in instruction that will be required to help students meet the demands of the new assessments.

The sample items and tasks can be viewed by grade band (grades 3-5, 6-8, and high school) or content focus. They showcase the variety of item types—including technology-enhanced items and performance tasks—that will be included in the Smarter Balanced assessment system. In addition, items illustrating the connections across grades within the CCSS—as well as the range of student achievement within a computer adaptive test—are also available. Most constructed-response and technology-enhanced items can be scored automatically, and many items include downloadable scoring rubrics.

Sample items and performance tasks are located on the Smarter Balanced Website at http://www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks/
Achievement Level Descriptors

Achievement level descriptors (ALDs) articulate the knowledge, skills, and processes expected of students at different levels of performance on the Smarter Balanced assessments. Smarter Balanced is developing an integrated suite of ALDs aligned with the Common Core State Standards and the Smarter Balanced assessment claims in English language arts/literacy and mathematics.

Draft initial ALDs were developed in October 2012 by K-12 teachers and administrators and higher education faculty from two- and four-year colleges and universities representing Smarter Balanced Governing States. The ALDs are linked to an operational definition of college content-readiness, as well as a policy framework to guide score interpretation for high schools and colleges.

Following their initial development, both the ALDs and the definition of college content-readiness were revised based on a series of reviews from member states, partners, and individual stakeholders. The ALDs were approved by Governing State vote on March 20, 2013. The college content-readiness policy was approved by Governing State vote on April 22, 2013. Final documents were released on April 29, 2013. The Smarter Balanced Achievement Level Descriptors are located on the Smarter Balanced website at: http://www.smarterbalanced.org/achievement-level-descriptors-and-college-readiness/

Accessibility and Accommodations: Meeting the Needs of All Students

Accessibility is a core principle of the design process. The Smarter Balanced assessment system will provide accurate measures of achievement and growth for students with disabilities and English language learners. The assessments will address visual, auditory, and physical access barriers—allowing virtually all students to demonstrate what they know and can do.
Smarter Balanced will include tools to improve accessibility for all students, while also supporting accommodations to meet the needs of students with disabilities and English language learners.

- Optional interim assessments provide information about student progress throughout the year to help teachers differentiate instruction.
- Measures student achievement and growth in English language arts/literacy and mathematics in grades 3-8 and 11.

The Smarter Balanced assessment system uses technology to deliver assessments that fit the needs of individual students. Items and tasks will be associated with a variety of accessibility tools and accommodations that can be delivered to students automatically based on their profile.

Accessibility tools include, but are not limited to: foreground and background colors; tactile presentation of content (e.g., Braille); and translated presentation of content in signed form and select languages. Online delivery of Smarter Balanced assessments ensures that students can take a test individualized to meet their needs at the same time as their peers. To access the Smarter Balanced Accessibility and Accommodations Framework please go to: http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/sa/access.asp

Transition to the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium and California’s New Assessment System

On January 8, 2013, State Superintendent of Public Instruction Tom Torlakson recommended shifting the focus of standardized testing in California to require students to think critically, solve problems, and show a greater depth of knowledge—key tenets of the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS).

In a report to the Governor and Legislature, Recommendations for Transitioning California to a Future Assessment System, Torlakson made 12 recommendations that would fundamentally change the state's student assessment system, replacing the paper-and-pencil based Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) Program assessments with computerized assessments developed by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) starting in the 2014–15 school year.
Torlakson’s report was mandated by Assembly Bill 250 (Brownley, D-Santa Monica), which the State Superintendent sponsored, to bring school curriculum, instruction, and the state assessment system into alignment with the CCSS. The state’s existing STAR Program assessments are scheduled to sunset July 1, 2014.

Among the 12 recommendations is the suspension of particular STAR Program assessments for the 2013-2014 school year unless the exams are specifically mandated by the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) or used for the Early Assessment Program (EAP). This would suspend STAR testing of second graders and end-of-course exams at the high-school level. The list of assessments that would be suspended can be located at:  
http://www.cde.ca.gov/ne/yr13/yr13rel4.asp?att

Through work group meetings, focus groups, regional public meetings, a statewide survey, and an e-mail account specifically for public comments, thousands of stakeholders provided input to the California Department of Education regarding the state’s transition to a new assessment system.

The following report fulfills the legislative requirement for the SSPI to provide recommendations and a plan for transitioning California to a new statewide student assessment system. It reflects the measures taken by the SSPI to gather and consider feedback from stakeholders to form the recommendations and plan. California’s goal through this process is to provide the best and most efficient assessments possible for its teachers and students.

Recommendations for Transitioning California to a Future Assessment System can be found on the Statewide Pupil Assessment System Web page located at  

More information on California’s efforts to implement the Common Core State Standards can be found on the California Department of Education’s Common Core State Standards Web page located at  
http://www.cde.ca.gov/re/cc/

Additional Links to SBAC Items and CCSS Resources

1. Inside Mathematics - Classroom video clips of teachers using CCSS  
http://insidemathematics.org/index.php/mathematical-content-standards

2. Edutopia – Classroom video clips & blogs  
http://www.edutopia.org/video
3. **The Hunt Institute** – CCSS Overview, Shifts and Literacy and Mathematical Practice Video Clips
   http://www.youtube.com/user/TheHuntInstitute#g/u

4. **Achieve the Core** – "Shift" Handouts and CCSS PD Modules
   http://www.achievethecore.org/steal-these-tools

5. **Tulare COE** – ELA/Literacy CCSS Lesson Templates (Scroll down the page until you see the "ELA CCCSS Templates" heading.)
   http://www.tcoe.org/ERS/CCSS/ELA/Resources.shtm

6. **Engage New York** – CCSS resources being used in New York
   http://engageny.org/common-core/

7. **North Carolina CCSS Toolkit** - "Unpacking the Standards" documenting specifics of what the CCSS indicate a student should know, understand, and be able to demonstrate at each grade level/in each content area.
   http://www.ncpublicschools.org/acre/standards/common-core-tools/

8. **SBAC - on-line practice items**
   ELA - http://sampleitems.smarterbalanced.org/itempreview/sbac/ELA.htm

9. **SBAC – released items** (Scroll down the page until you see the "Item/Task Specifications" heading. These are the released Items that have the supporting documentation, including rubrics and text complexity descriptions.)
   http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/#item

10. **ETS Computer-based Practice Items**
    http://star.caltesting.org/tutorials/student/star.html

**Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)**

Smarter Balanced FAQs can be accessed at