WHAT DO THE SCORES MEAN? Q&A

Q. What is the issue that Smarter Balanced is trying to address with the "What Do the Scores Mean?" document?

A. The media often incorrectly reports that students who aren't proficient "can't do math" or "can't read." This is not true. The Smarter Balanced assessments are aligned to grade-level content, and students who achieve Levels 2, 3, and 4 do, in fact, demonstrate a continuum of grade-level knowledge and skills.

Q. Does this mean that Smarter Balanced has lowered the standards and expectations for students?

A. No. In 2014, Smarter Balanced coordinated one of the largest standard-setting workshops in the history of large-scale assessment that included about 500 educators in person and more than 2,000 respondents online. Together, these participants recommended rigorous achievement levels that describe a progression from grade 3 to high school that helps educators, students, and families understand whether students are on track to leave high school with the essential knowledge and skills that will allow them to pursue a full range of opportunities in college or careers. These new statements clarify the achievement standards but do not change the level of rigor in the assessments they describe or how scores align to the achievement levels of the assessments.

Q. What are "achievement level labels"?

A. Achievement level labels are the labels for the categories used to describe student performance within the range of each of the adopted cut-scores. Some examples of achievement level labels are "Level 2" and "Nearly Meets" as well as "Level 3," "Proficient," and "Meets." Historically, Smarter Balanced members have chosen their own achievement level labels.

Q. What are "reporting achievement level descriptors"?

A. Reporting achievement level descriptors are brief descriptions of the knowledge and skills students demonstrate on the assessment within each cut-score range. These descriptors are high-level summaries of the more detailed achievement level descriptors that were used during the achievement level standard-setting process. The reporting achievement level descriptors are designed to be short enough that they can be included on statewide and individual student reports whereas the full achievement level descriptors are too long for those reports. Historically, Smarter Balanced members have chosen their own reporting achievement level labels based on the Smarter Balanced achievement level descriptors.

Q. How should states use these new reporting achievement level descriptors?

A. States/territories have the option of continuing to use their existing reporting achievement level descriptors or these new descriptors in their statewide and individual student reporting. States can refer the media and other members of the public to the document to help them understand the relationship

between grade-level knowledge and skills and student performance on the Smarter Balanced assessments.

Q. What do you mean by "increasing complexity" in Smarter Balanced assessments?

A. In English language arts, complexity can increase through more complex reading passages in terms of attributes such as longer sentences, more new concepts in the text, and/or more advanced vocabulary. In mathematics, problem complexity can increase in terms of attributes such as the number of elements in equations and/or the degree of advanced reasoning, and inferencing required within word problems.