

The following is a sample of a letter your school or district can send to parents to explain Idaho's transition to a new assessment and the Field Test this spring.

Dear Parent,

As Idaho transitions to new, higher academic standards in mathematics and English language arts, we also must transition to a new test that will measure how every student is performing in meeting these new standards. In Idaho, we are transitioning to the Smarter Balanced Assessment to replace the ISAT.

As a state, we are excited to move toward the Smarter Balanced Assessment next year because it will be a better assessment than the ISAT. Whereas the ISAT was a stagnant, multiple-choice-only test, this new assessment provides multiple question types to better measure what a child knows and is able to do at the end of each grade level. The questions on the Smarter Balanced Assessment also will challenge students in different ways from the ISAT. Because this test is aligned to the new Idaho Core Standards, students now are learning at a higher level in mathematics and English language arts. In the classroom, students are now expected to think more critically and problem solve more frequently. With Smarter Balanced, students will now be measured against these higher expectations on the year-end test. Instead of a multiple-choice-only test, students will be asked to explain their answers, write essays, and more.

The transition to a new test takes time. In this case, the state is phasing in a new test to replace the ISAT over three years. In Spring 2013, the state piloted the test in 124 schools. This spring, the state is field testing the new assessment in all of Idaho's public schools. Next year, the test will be fully implemented.

Idaho chose to conduct a Field Test in all Idaho public schools this year, rather than double-testing the new Smarter Balanced Assessment as well as the ISAT. The state did not want students to have to take two tests. In addition, the Field Test is necessary before the state fully implements a new test across Idaho. The Field Test is essentially a "dress rehearsal," or an opportunity for all schools to test the test. Any time the state transitions to a new assessment, the state conducts a Field Test in order to test the validity and reliability of new test questions as well as other aspects of the test. For example, through a Field Test, the state could learn if the instructions for a specific test question need to be rewritten so students can better understand it. Or we might learn if the accommodations made available for a student with special needs are sufficient enough or need to be improved before the test is fully implemented. These are just two examples. A Field Test also is important at a local level because it provides each school the opportunity to test its technology and logistics.

Because the state is conducting a Field Test this year, scoring data will not be available for students. This will only occur this year. Next year, scores will be available for every student as well as every year after that.

While student-level scores will not be available in Spring 2014, the state and local schools will gather other valuable information from the Field Test this year. For example, the Field Test gives all students the opportunity to experience the new test and new types of test questions before next year when it becomes fully operational and scores are given. It also gives every school, school administrator, and teacher a year to test out their logistics, technology and scheduling before implementing the operational test in Spring 2015. In addition, the state will gain better feedback by conducting the Field Test across the entire state, rather than in a selected sample.

Even though this is essentially a practice round, we want every child to try their best. Please encourage your child to take the Field Test seriously this spring. Here are a few ways you can help your child prepare for the Field Test:

- Visit <http://sbac.portal.airast.org/practice-test/> and take a few practice test questions with your child. Experience the test questions with your child before the Field Test. This can help them immensely, especially in the comfort of their own home.
- The Idaho Core Standards emphasize critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. Because of this, students will be asked to think critically and problem solve on the new test. This may be new to some students. As a parent, you can ask your child more open-ended questions throughout the day. Encourage your child to think critically in everyday life, such as when you are in the grocery store or at the dinner table. Ask more “why” questions and let them know it is okay if they don’t answer right away. Problem-solving takes time.
- Before the test, make sure your child eats a healthy breakfast, gets a lot of rest and comes to school prepared and comfortable to take this test.

If you have any questions about the new assessment or the Field Test, please be sure to contact your local school or the school district office.

Thank you,
(Principal or Superintendent)