

**IMPROVING TEACHING AND LEARNING
WITH **TOOLS FOR TEACHERS**
AND THE SMARTER BALANCED SYSTEM**

AGENDA

Welcome and Introductions

Overview

A Balanced System of Assessment

Using the Smarter Balanced System with Tools for Teachers

- Interim Assessments
- Tools for Teachers
- Getting Started with Interims
- Additional Resources
- Q&A

SMARTER BALANCED INTERIM ASSESSMENT OVERVIEW

- **Interim Assessment Blocks and Comprehensive Interims**

- ▶ Grades 3-8, and 11
- ▶ ELA and Mathematics

- **DRC INSIGHT**

- ▶ Same assessment delivery engine as M-STEP, MI-Access, Early Literacy & Mathematics, and WIDA

- **Participation is Free**

- ▶ No cost to districts for using products

- **Tools for Teachers**

- ▶ Direct connections to lessons and instructional resources

SMARTER OVERVIEW

- Student performance on Interim Comprehensive Assessments (ICAs) is reported on the same scoring scale as the summative assessment and therefore are predictive of student performance on the M-STEP summative assessments.
- Districts and schools have the flexibility to administer the Interim Assessments up to 10 times during the school year.

SMARTER OVERVIEW

Reporting

- Student reports are intuitive and user friendly, with fast results and the ability to track student progress over time.
- Assessment results are linked to the *Tools for Teachers* digital platform, a rich resource created by teachers with materials, activities, and lessons that can be used to improve student learning.

SMARTER OVERVIEW - SUPPORTS AND ACCOMMODATIONS

Testing Supports available:

- Masking
- Color Preferences
- Text-To-Speech*
- Text-to-Speech for ELA Passages in Grades 6-8*

*Must be assigned as a designated support in the student profile in the DRC INSIGHT Portal prior to printing the student test ticket.

SMARTER BALANCED TOOLS FOR TEACHERS

Summative

Balanced

Formative

LEARNING AND ASSESSMENT

In a 2018 study investigating student engagement, researchers noted that where engagement was lacking students struggled with **“learning as it is assessed and learning as they experience it.”**

Smarter Balanced connects learning and assessment so that students can

- show what they've learned.
- see the value of their classwork in their end-of-year results.
- feel motivated by and engaged in their learning progress.

TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT

- When summative assessments aren't aligned with instruction, students are asked to demonstrate learning without relevant instruction and educators can't measure what students have learned. The assessment only shows what they already knew and could do.
- Teachers need opportunities to see student progress during the year. Formative assessments aligned to end-of-year targets
 - let students know how they are doing with regard to their grade-level expectations.
 - give teachers a chance to help meet students' individual needs along the way to proficiency.

(From the Boise State Center for Teaching and Learning, 2023)

THE POWER OF FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

According to CERI (Centre for Educational Research and Innovation): “Formative assessment has shown that it is perhaps one of the **most important interventions for promoting high-performance ever studied.**”

Formative assessment is how teachers monitor how well students understand concepts and skills in order to

- meet students' individual needs.
- move toward greater equity of student outcomes.
- help their students prepare for college or career.

FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT: TWO USES

Supplementing Curriculum Instruction:

Formative assessments can be scheduled into the academic year to check if students are meeting grade-level expectations while there is still time to adjust instruction.

When formative assessments are aligned to the summative and *not* embedded in the curriculum, they can give educators information about where the curriculum might have gaps or lack rigor.

Just-In-Time Adjustments to Lessons:

Formative assessment can also be used within lessons to see if the instruction is effective. Formative assessment within a lesson gives teachers the information they need to make just-in-time adjustments.

WHAT WE MEAN BY FORMATIVE ASSESSMENT

Smarter Balanced treats formative assessment as a process, not a tool. Smarter Balanced:

- aligns assessment and instruction. This helps **clarify** learning goals.
- offers assessment tools to help educators **elicit** what students know and can do through standardized test formats or interactive routines.
- provides advice to teachers to help them **interpret** the information they collect from scoring reports or classroom observation.
- makes it easy to **act** on next instructional steps with prepared lessons and intervention suggestions.

SMARTER BALANCED TOOLS FOR TEACHERS

WHY USE SMARTER BALANCED INTERIM ASSESSMENTS?

- **Predictive validity.** Alignment with the summative shows educators how students are doing with grade-level priority standards and gives them time to adjust instruction.
- **Quality information and assessment transparency.** Educators can see interim questions and the blueprint with which they were created. Interim reports give specific information about students' individual responses and provide distractor analysis so educators can group students with similar needs and correct common misconceptions.
- **Relief for assessment stress.** Interim administration rehearses the summative process, smoothing the steps for teachers and minimizing cognitive load on students so they can give a more accurate picture of what they know and can do.
- **A boost for curriculum.** Assessments built into the curriculum can't surface unaddressed skills or lack of instructional rigor that may be uncovered later on the summative assessment. When gaps between instruction and assessment are discovered, the Instructional Resources in Tools for Teachers offer a time-saving solution for reteaching assessed standards.

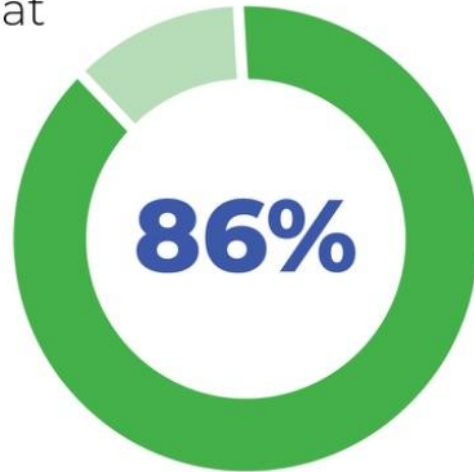
RESULTS FROM CALIFORNIA AND CONNECTICUT

Validated Predictive Relationship (California, 2025)

A 2025 study of California students in grades 3–8 and 11 confirmed that the Interim Comprehensive Assessment (ICA) is a **robust and reliable indicator** of end-of-year performance.

0.87 - 0.92

Interim results correlate highly with Summative Assessment.



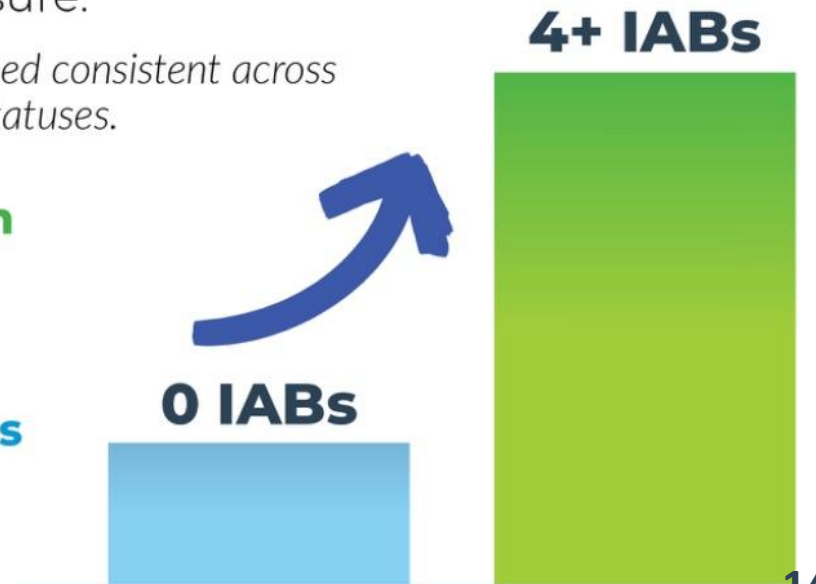
Classification accuracy across all grades and content areas.

Integrated Use Drives Growth (Connecticut, 2023)

Students who completed **four or more Interim Assessment Blocks (IABs)** achieved **significantly higher mean scale score growth** on the Summative Assessment compared to peers with no IAB exposure.

The trend remained consistent across socioeconomic statuses.

Higher Mean Scale Score Gains on Summative Assessments



INTERIM ASSESSMENTS SIZED TO FIT THE PURPOSE

- **Interims** share rigor and testing environment with the summative assessments.
- Most assessments don't require any hand-scoring. Only WER (full writes associated with the PT) and SA (short answer brief writes) require hand scoring.
- Educators can choose standard or nonstandard administration.
- They can be used with individuals, groups, classes, or school- / district-wide.
- They offer the same accessibility tools as the summative assessments.

USE CONTENT EXPLORER TO LEARN MORE

Use **Content Explorer** to see how assessment items are created.

Search Content Explorer by grade, subject, claim, and target/standard, or test to find:

- Range Achievement Level Descriptors—what student learning looks like at each level (1, 2, 3, and 4) of understanding.
- Evidence statements about the student should be able to do for a given content area.
- Test item guidelines, including DOK (depth of knowledge) requirements, key vocabulary, and allowable accessibility tools.
- Example items and item types.

ASSESSMENT ITEMS CAN BE USED DURING INSTRUCTION

Use assessment items during instructional time as

- Quick checks, success criteria, entrance/exit tickets.
- Differentiated practice opportunities for groups or individuals.
- Prompts for metacognitive problem-solving models or discussions.

The Sample Item Website (SIW) is open to the public and those items have unrestricted use—including posting on homework pages.

The Interim Assessment Item Portal (IAIP) includes more information (as well as the answer key for interims). These items can be used in the classroom but shouldn't appear publicly, as they are in the interim assessment item pool.

USING INTERIM CONNECTIONS PLAYLISTS

After giving an interim and reviewing the reporting results, you can search for an **Interim Connections Playlist (ICP)** in Tools for Teachers to support next instructional steps.

On the Tools for Teachers homepage, scroll down and click [here](#).

Then, use the search feature to find relevant playlists.

INTERIM CONNECTIONS PLAYLISTS (ICPs)

SUPPLEMENTAL INSTRUCTION ALIGNED TO INTERIMS

- **Student Performance Progressions** help educators quickly differentiate instruction based on student's interim results: Below, Near, or Above.
- **Instructional resource links** in the left column take teachers to skill lessons made to save time.

Continue....

EXPLORING WHAT THE PLAYLISTS OFFER

- **Suggestions for Intervention** give educators specific, bite-sized skills and steps for students who need support.
- **Things to Consider** offers direct links to Interim Assessments and Interim Connections Playlists for educators who want to take a deeper dive.

Continue....

INTERIM CONNECTIONS PLAYLISTS ALSO INCLUDE

- **Interim Assessment Block/IAB**
Background gives educators fine-grain information about the Interim Assessment Blocks. If they already gave an IAB, it may help remind them of the assessed skills. If not, it may prompt them to give the attached IAB and get actionable student data.
- **Academic Vocabulary** supports thinking about what all students need to know and understand. This also has specific applicability for English Learners.

LESSON QUALITY EDUCATORS CAN TRUST

Over 700 ELA and math Instructional Resources in Tools for Teachers have been created by educators for educators.

- The State Network of Educators (SNEs) who write the instructional resource lessons are highly experienced in their content area and grade level.
- Lessons are designed to be ready-to-teach with presentation/handout materials along with
 - Differentiation suggestions.
 - Formative Assessment Strategies.
 - Accessibility Strategies.
 - Language Goals to address the needs of English Learners.
- All resources are peer reviewed by fellow educators and reviewed again by the Tools for Teacher team to ensure quality.



Interims & Tools for Teachers
An Introduction for State and
Local Education Agencies



SUPPORT FOR GETTING STARTED WITH INTERIMS

To get started with this system of balanced assessment, we are creating an on-demand series to offer guidance for selecting, scheduling, and implementing Smarter Balanced interims.

A planning module for local leaders guides them to

- Name the people who should be in the room for planning.
- Identify local goals.
- Conduct an assessment inventory to avoid duplication.
- Schedule selected interims in coordination with local curricula.

A four-part series of trainings for teacher leaders and PLCs helps educators

- Clarify the goals of the interim assessment.
- Elicit what students know and can do through interim administration.
- Interpret information from interim reports to understand student needs.
- Act on that information to adjust instruction using Tools for Teachers.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, SEE...

- [Interim and Formative Assessment Playbook](#)
- [Interim Assessment Overview](#)
- [Starting Smarter \(For MI Parents and Families\)](#)
- [Smarter Resources](#)
- [Connecticut Report on Interims and Student Growth](#)
- [Interim Success Stories](#)

MICHIGAN'S PILOT

- **You can implement the interims in your choice of arrangements for 2026-2027**
 - ▶ Blocks, comprehensive, specific buildings, specific grade levels
 - ▶ One registration for the Michigan Continuous Improvement Conference
 - ▶ One registration for the Michigan School Testing Conference

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER

- What is your current interim assessment doing for your school? Teachers? Students?
- How are you currently connecting your interim assessment to instruction?
- How does your current interim assessment solution connect to Michigan's standards?
- How does your current interim assessment solution connect to M-STEP?
- How does it connect to FAME?
- What else do you need to evaluate?

COMPREHENSIVE, CONTINUOUS, COHERENT

- Comprehensive
- Continuous opportunities throughout year
- Coherent system

Q&A SESSION

IF YOU'RE READY

- **Send an e-mail to Jen Paul at paulj@michigan.gov.**
 - ▶ Include names and e-mails of interested educators so that access can be granted in DRC's system
 - ▶ Setup students, test sessions, accommodations
 - Users will add students directly to the DRC INSIGHT Portal

IF YOU'RE NOT READY

- **Please send an e-mail to Jen Paul at paulj@michigan.gov.**
 - ▶ What other info do you need?

THANK

YOU