



California Assessment of  
Student Performance and Progress

# CAASPP in Action

Sharing Practices in Implementing the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) System to Improve Teaching and Learning

**Powered by Professional Learning  
Communities: The Use of Interim Assessment  
Blocks by the Val Verde Unified School District**



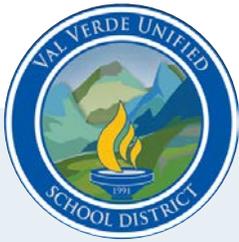
# Val Verde Unified School District

Powered by Professional Learning Communities: The Use of Interim Assessment Blocks by the Val Verde Unified School District

## DISTRICT PROFILE

The Val Verde Unified School District, located in the heart of the Inland Empire in Southern California, serves more than 20,000 students in kindergarten through grade twelve. The district operates one preschool, twelve elementary schools, four middle schools, three comprehensive high schools, one student success academy, one virtual academy, and one continuation high school. Seven of the district's schools are recognized as California Distinguished Schools.

Approximately 82 percent of the students qualify for free or reduced-price meals, and about 20 percent of the students are classified as English learners. Eleven percent of students require special education services and less than 1 percent of students are classified as foster youths.



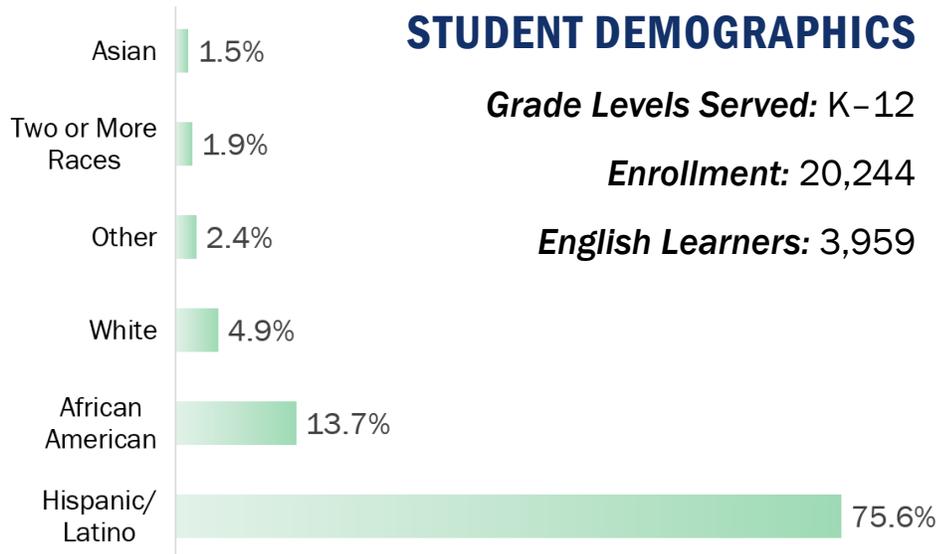
*It is Val Verde Unified School District's mission to create a positive environment that produces life-long learners who will become responsible, contributing citizens able to function in a culturally diverse society.*

## STUDENT DEMOGRAPHICS

**Grade Levels Served: K-12**

**Enrollment: 20,244**

**English Learners: 3,959**



## GOAL

The Val Verde Unified School District used all three elements of the Smarter Balanced Assessment System—formative assessment processes and the Digital Library, interim assessments, and summative assessments—to reach the following set of goals:

- Familiarize students with item types and assessment formats.
- Allow teachers to gain a better understanding of how claims and targets are assessed.
- Provide students with opportunities to practice using accessibility resources before using them on summative assessments.
- Expose students to the rigorous academic vocabulary used on the summative assessments.

## APPROACH

Beginning in 2014–15, teachers and instructional coaches were inspired by the district leaders to try at least one Interim Assessment Block (IAB) for English language arts/literacy (ELA) and one IAB for mathematics. The district's approach to implementation focused on embedding the IABs in the instructional cycle and immediately engaging the Val Verde Professional Learning Community (PLC). As part of a vibrant PLC, instructional coaches and administrators serve as the designated leaders for IAB implementation at the site level, providing teachers with a point of contact. Teachers can take advantage of this built-in support network by seeking out general information about the IABs, requesting administration support, and receiving assistance in post-administration activities, such as review and analysis of the student responses.

To support this movement, high-quality professional development was provided for all staff on the administration of the assessments, analysis and implementation of results from IABs, effective use of the Digital Library and its resources, and the connections between the IABs and the Digital Library. Team training days soon became a part of the district support and collaboration culture.

As one of the first steps, the Val Verde Unified School District held full-day trainings on IABs for administrators and instructional coaches, which enabled them to support the use of IABs and provide site-level training to teachers. The training continued throughout the year on Professional Learning Days. One of the keys to the successful implementation of IABs was the district's "system of time and support," which includes leadership-level support for classroom coverage, collaborative working groups, and dedicated time for analyzing results. The teachers met weekly (and continue to do so) to discuss the IAB results, review student responses, and focus on answering the following questions:

- What do we want students to learn?
- How are we going to know that they learned it?
- How are we going to respond if the students don't learn it?
- How are we going to respond if they already know it?



***I appreciate the thorough dissection of student responses contained in the Interim Assessment Reporting System after taking [an] IAB. With this information, I am able to focus with laser-like accuracy on exactly which student needs what particular kind of help. I also appreciate the ease with which I am able to get this information from the reporting system. Very helpful!***

*—5th grade teacher*

Once site-level training was completed, staff members created an annual IAB administration schedule to ensure consistency and formalize the plans. Each site determined how many IABs the teachers would administer in their classrooms, with some sites choosing to administer more than the minimum suggested by the district.

Today, in addition to the standardized administration of the IABs, teachers incorporate IABs into their lesson plans and use them in non-standardized ways. One example of non-standardized administration is the accessing of IABs through the Interim Assessment Viewing System as a morning warm-up activity in which students are asked to respond to IAB items individually, in pairs, or in groups to allow teachers to conduct an informal assessment of student learning.

Site teams use district-created CAASPP data charts and goal setting sheets to analyze the data resulting from the standardized administration of the IABs, discuss student strengths and weaknesses, and outline next steps for student success using a list of guiding questions. Teachers use a strategic protocol for IAB data analysis, which starts with sorting the questions by those most missed. The teachers then review student responses, formulate the plan for how to address the gaps in knowledge through classroom instruction, and provide



additional instruction before they administer the IAB again to gauge whether the teaching has been successful and learning has taken place.

Since the successful initial implementation, educators in the Val Verde Unified School District have continued using student IAB responses to evaluate student knowledge and skills and inform teaching and learning.

## RESOURCES

The district is using a variety of tools made available by the California Department of Education and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. These include the summative and interim assessment blueprints, the practice and training tests, and the California curriculum frameworks. The Val Verde Unified School District uses these tools, along with district-developed tables that map

claims and targets to the Common Core State Standards, to help teachers better understand how to administer the IABs for their grade level and see the underlying content and the depth of knowledge at which the content is being assessed.

Teachers make full use of the practice and training tests in their classrooms on a regular basis to help students become familiar with the assessments and the available accessibility resources. District leadership is confident that the more students actively engage with the assessment system using the IABs, the more successful they will be in classroom activities and on the summative assessments. The Val Verde Unified School District teachers have seen students' confidence and success grow the more they have become accustomed to the testing platforms, item types, and accessibility resources available for the IABs.

*Having students take these assessments allows teachers to reflect on our teaching, modify it as needed, and hone in on specific skills that may need to be remediated.*

*—5th grade teacher*

## **IMPLEMENTATION TEAM**

Val Verde's successful implementation of interim assessments is attributed to the districtwide commitment to improving teaching and learning by consistently using IABs in all classrooms and the responsibilities carried out in various district roles. For example, the Director of Assessment and Accountability and the Superintendent have been instrumental in the use of the IABs across the district. The Director of Assessment and Accountability provides ongoing training and support for the IABs and the Digital Library. The Assessment and Accountability Department works closely with the Technology Department to ensure that the necessary technology and infrastructure are in place for the summative and interim assessments.

The Assessment and Accountability Department also collaborates with the Special Education Department to promote the appropriate assignment of accessibility resources for students with disabilities. The process for ensuring that each student with an individualized education program is matched with appropriate accessibility resources in the assessment system requires time and expertise. The district's Director of Assessment and Accountability serves as an expert on the accessibility features available in the CAASPP System, and the educators who serve students with disabilities focus on the specific needs of each student. The partnership between the teacher and the director is critically important to ensuring that each student has the appropriate accessibility features available during IABs and the CAASPP administration.

The Val Verde PLC supports and guides the use of the IABs and the Digital Library in part by having instructional coaches and administrators provide trainings on IABs at the school sites. The commitment to maintaining a highly functional PLC results in protected time to collaborate, analyze IAB results, and develop instructional resources. Teacher teams get together a minimum of one hour per week to consider the guiding questions outlined at the beginning of this report. They work with students on setting goals, deciding what is needed from the teacher and the parents for the student to be successful. The students also

look at their own growth, and the teachers consider whether the practices used in their classrooms have addressed the areas of weakness. This practice greatly increases students' confidence and motivation as they head into testing.

*I value the data it provides once the students complete an IAB. I am able to pinpoint specific students' strengths and weaknesses. I enjoy being able to practice as a group . . . it's fun!*

*—3rd/4th grade teacher*

*I find the IABs very useful because, although we teach and practice the standards throughout the year, the IABs provide questions that are phrased in a way similar to the SBAC summative test.*

*—3rd grade teacher*

*IABs allow students to have the confidence that they need when taking the state test because they are able to focus on showing what they know instead of struggling with the technicalities of taking an online test.*

*—4th grade teacher*

***It gives our scholars a chance to utilize the tools within the test. For example: My students learned how to type out a mixed number, which can be a challenge for students who have never had an opportunity to do this prior to taking the assessment.***

*—3rd/4th grade teacher*

***The Digital Library is also full of complex, higher-level resources that challenge students to think critically.***

*—5th grade teacher*

## **LESSONS LEARNED**

The Val Verde Unified School District learned a great deal during the districtwide implementation of the IABs:

### ***Start Small***

Initially encouraging only one IAB for ELA and one for mathematics per year in each class allowed the administrators, coaches, and teachers to fully embrace this new direction of embedding the IABs in the instructional cycle and inspired some to go above and beyond by choosing to administer more than the suggested minimum number of IABs.

### ***Motivate, Don't Mandate***

By asking teachers for their feedback on the IABs and implementing their ideas and suggestions, the district created an environment of mutual trust and respect. The educators' feedback not only helped with the development of a strong PLC, but also increased teachers' motivation to administer IABs in their classrooms and use the results to improve teaching and learning.

### ***Knowledge is Power***

Among other things, the IAB results provide valuable information about item types, the depth of knowledge required by each question, and the students' command of the content. Making this information available to teachers created an opportunity for classroom dialogue about students' responses and encouraged students to take a more active role in their learning.

### ***Make Resources and Supports Readily Available***

The district saw the need for an educator communication platform where teachers and district leadership could ask and answer questions, communicate information, and connect with the resources that support the use of IABs, such as summative and interim assessment blueprints, the California curriculum frameworks, and the district-developed tables that map claims and targets to the Common Core State Standards. Google Drive was selected as the district collaboration tool, and it has been instrumental in developing an environment of trust, support, and cooperation.



## NEXT STEPS

Moving forward, the Val Verde Unified School District will focus on the following goals:

### ***Continue to support the use of the IABs and the Digital Library***

- Promote the use of IABs and the Digital Library Connections Playlists at all district training sessions.
- Communicate with educators actively and consistently by sending email reminders about different ways to use these resources to increase student achievement.
- Continue to share ideas and techniques to increase the use of these valuable tools through the work of a dynamic PLC.

### ***Expand the use of IABs and Digital Library Playlists***

The Digital Library Connections Playlists have been instrumental in incentivizing teachers' exploration of the Digital Library. In addition, the enhanced features of the Interim Assessment Reporting System, such as student-level data, linking of test results to the Playlists, and the ability to administer IABs in a standardized or non-standardized manner, have

played an important role in encouraging teachers to administer IABs. Based on the high value of those two tools, the Val Verde Unified School District adopted additional goals:

- Provide more protected time to explore the Digital Library.
- Provide additional training on the Digital Library and Playlists.
- Promote the use of constructed-response test items and performance tasks.
- Encourage the use of IABs and the Digital Library at the high school level.
- Support the use of IABs and the Digital Library among educators serving students in a separate classroom.

The CAASPP System is dynamic, and it continually evolves to serve the needs of educators and students. The Val Verde Unified School District leadership team understands this and is committed to providing meaningful support via a powerful PLC presence for the IAB implementation initiative. By revisiting the implementation plan every year, Val Verde continually adjusts its approach in response to the available IAB results as well as in response to educator and student feedback.

## ADDITIONAL USEFUL RESOURCES

ELA/Literacy Summative Assessment Blueprint (PDF)

<https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/elaliteracy-summative-assessment-blueprint.pdf>

Mathematics Summative Assessment Blueprint (PDF)

<https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/mathematics-summative-assessment-blueprint.pdf>

Estimated Testing Times (PDF)

<https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/estimated-testing-times.pdf>

Enhanced CAT Blueprints for Students Participating in the 2018–19 Embedded Field Test of Performance Tasks (PDF)

<https://portal.smarterbalanced.org/library/en/2018-19-enhanced-cat-blueprints-eft-pt.pdf>

Val Verde Includes Their 'Scholars' in the Use of Interim Assessment Results (Video)

<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/educators/classroom/valverde-ca/>

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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CDE CAASPP Web Page

<https://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca>

CAASPP Portal

<http://www.caaspp.org>