



# CAASPP in Action

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Sharing Practices  
in Implementing  
the CAASPP System  
to Improve Teaching  
and Learning

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California Assessment of  
Student Performance and Progress

Using the Smarter Balanced  
Practice and Training Tests  
Natomas Charter School



# Using the Smarter Balanced Practice and Training Tests

# Natomas Charter School



## MISSION STATEMENT

Reforming public education by developing quality, innovative educational opportunities.

“...teachers expanded the project and created instructional materials for parents to use at home with their students.”

Information provided by Natomas Charter School.

## SCHOOL PROFILE

Natomas Charter School consists of five academies that include site-based elementary, middle, and high schools, as well as a home school program and a blended-learning high school.

GRADES SERVED **TK-12**

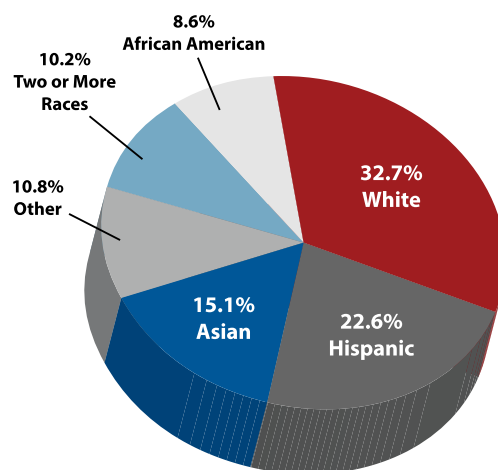
TEACHERS **79**

ENROLLMENT **1,836**

ENGLISH LEARNERS **12%**

LOW INCOME **25%**

SPECIAL EDUCATION **4%**



ETHNIC DIVERSITY OF STUDENTS

## GOAL

Use the Smarter Balanced practice and training tests for English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics in select classrooms to familiarize teachers, students, and their families with the testing interface, the format and type of questions, and the available accessibility resources.

## IMPLEMENTATION TEAM

The implementation team involved administrators, teachers, parents/guardians, and students. Via word-of-mouth, administrators encouraged teachers to volunteer to use the Smarter Balanced practice tests in grade-level or department teams. Recognizing that the practice tests could also form the foundation of a good “family conversation” or homework project, teachers expanded the project and created instructional materials for parents to use at home with their students. The implementation team created a five-minute video to support parents.

## APPROACH

Natomas Charter School wanted teachers, students, and their families to become familiar with the “look and feel” of the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessments for ELA and mathematics. On a voluntary basis, teachers across the different grade spans

used the practice and/or training tests with elementary, middle, and high school students because Natomas Charter School serves students from transitional kindergarten through grade twelve. Using the practice tests was an effective way to have students talk through strategies for approaching different test questions and to educate parents.

**Smarter Balanced makes both training and practice tests available for students. The table below highlights the features of each.**

	PRACTICE TESTS	TRAINING TESTS
PURPOSE	Provide students with a grade-specific testing experience similar in structure and format to the summative assessments.	Provide students with an opportunity to quickly become familiar with the software and interface features. There are no performance tasks.
GRADE LEVELS	One test for each of grades 3 through 8, and grade 11.	One test for each of three grade bands: 3–5, 6–8, and high school.
ITEMS	Approximately 30 items in ELA and 30 items in math per grade level, as well as one ELA performance task and one math performance task per grade level.	Approximately 15 items per test (6 in ELA and 8–9 in math); no performance tasks are included.
RESULTS	Results are not scored, but answer keys and scoring rubrics are available.	Results are not scored; no scoring rubrics or answer keys are available.

Universal tools, designated supports, and accommodations are available on all practice and training tests.

Quick Reference Guides are available online for Training and Practice Tests.

How to Start a Training Test: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/documents/summativevrngtestqrg.pdf>

How to Start a Practice Test: <http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca/documents/practicetestqrg.pdf>

### **Elementary Grades**

Elementary teachers asked their students to work on the practice test in pairs. Pairing the students was done to give students a chance to talk about the test questions as they were thinking them through as well as lean on each other for support while navigating the testing interface (e.g., which button to press to move on to the next question, how to access universal tools). In some classes, after the paired students had completed their work, the entire class talked about the strategies they had identified that helped them solve one of the test questions.

## APPROACH, continued

### **Middle Grades**

In one middle school classroom, teachers had their students work on the Smarter Balanced practice test for ELA in pairs to think through their responses. After the students completed their work in pairs, the teacher projected the scoring guide on the screen, and the entire class looked through the scoring guide together, talking about the reasoning behind the correct answers.

In another classroom, the teacher provided an overview to students before they worked through the practice test. In that overview, the teacher highlighted the different formats for test questions and which accessibility resources (e.g., calculator) might be available to students on certain questions and how they could access those tools. At the conclusion of the overview, the students worked on the practice tests individually. After completing the practice test, the entire class engaged in a discussion about the type of test questions they saw, which ones gave them particular challenges, and how they might approach those types of questions if they were presented on the summative assessment.

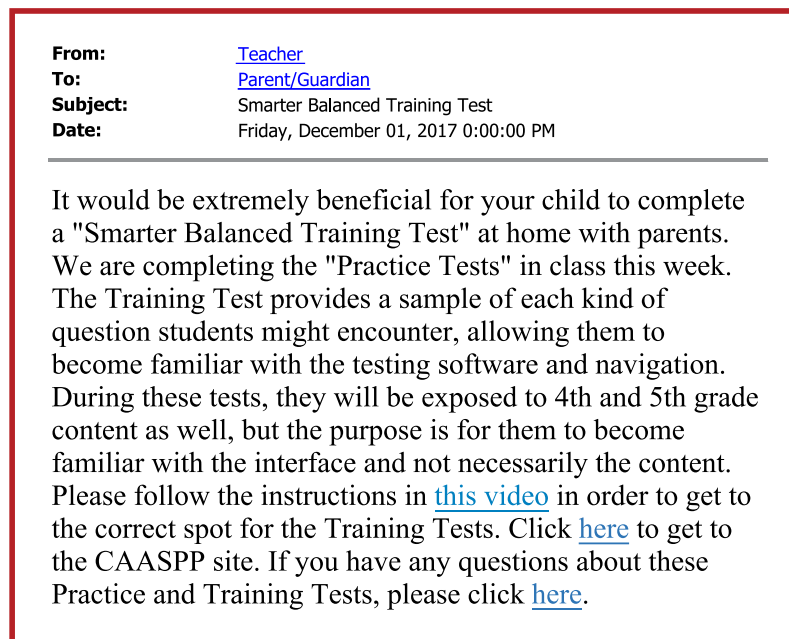
### **High School**

One of the high school teachers used the training and practice tests to highlight multiple aspects of the testing interface. The teacher first used the training test to conduct an orientation to the testing interface and highlight the type of questions that students might see on the summative assessment. During another class session, the teacher asked students to complete sections of the practice tests in pairs. After the students completed their

work, the entire class engaged in a discussion about the test questions and the correct responses. The teacher also used the practice tests as an opportunity to model the universal tools by projecting the practice test on to the screen and demonstrating how the universal tools can be used on different questions.

### **Communicating with Parents/Guardians**

In addition to the work that the students did in pairs during class, some teachers gave students a homework assignment to access the Smarter Balanced practice and/or training test at home with their parents. This



**Figure 1: E-mail Communication to Parents/Guardians of Elementary School Students**

assignment was given in the spring, about four to six weeks prior to the summative assessments. There were two reasons for this approach: (1) students would need to navigate the test interface independently without peer support, and (2) parents would be able to see the type of testing interface on which their child was working as well as the type of questions they would receive during testing. Figure 1 shows the text of a sample e-mail communication to parents of elementary students, directing them to online resources, including an instructional five-minute video.

A five-minute video was created for parents to help them access and log in to take the practice tests. It can be viewed at <https://youtu.be/VuB31J-UNkQ>.



## BENEFITS OF USING THE PRACTICE AND TRAINING TESTS

Natomas Charter School identified a number of benefits to using the practice and/or training tests prior to having the students take the Smarter Balanced Summative Assessment, including:

- Students becoming familiar with the testing interface and the test format.
- Students viewing and solving sample problems that they might encounter on the real test.
- Students accessing and using some of the embedded tools.
- Students revisiting concepts taught earlier in the school year.
- Increasing parents' familiarity with the testing interface and the type of test questions that their children would see during testing.

## CHALLENGES

Natomas Charter School did not encounter any challenges with use of the practice and training tests, either at school or with students and their parents at home. Teachers, students, and their families found the practice and training tests easy to access and use. As the use of the practice tests spread among teachers at the school, some responded with, "Why didn't I think of that?" and then offered last-minute opportunities for students to work with the practice tests in advance of the summative assessment.

## TEACHERS' EXPERIENCES

"[Using the practice tests] helped refresh their memories and get back into the frame of mind needed for the test."

—5th Grade Teacher

"Those students who struggled with using the system were helped by those who knew more."

—4th Grade Teacher

"Working in pairs definitely helped students work through difficult problems."

—4th Grade Teacher

"Having the scoring guide helped to set expectations, especially on written responses."

—6th Grade Teacher

"It reminds students what the test is going to look like and what they can anticipate doing. My students agreed that they forget over the course of the year and that they like the reminder so it is not something new to them when they take the test. They also get a sense of how long it takes them to go through and answer the questions. Some students told me that they realized they needed more time for reading than they thought. Overall, the practice reminds them of what it will be like to take the test."

—7th Grade Teacher

## NEXT STEPS

### ***Expand the use of practice and training tests into additional classrooms.***

Using these experiences as a model, the administration of Natomas Charter School will continue to emphasize the benefits to teachers and students of using the practice and training tests. Use of the practice and training tests, as well as use of the Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments, will both be part of their fall schoolwide data conversations about CAASPP scores. The overall goal is to provide more opportunities for students to interact with the various types of Smarter Balanced assessment items prior to the summative assessment in the spring, especially for students in grades three through five, who often are a bit more overwhelmed with the testing interface than older students.

### ***Reevaluate the use of the Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments.***

Natomas Charter School is excited about the new Interim Assessment Reporting System now available from the California Department of



**Students will become familiar with the Smarter Balanced assessment interface with increased use in the classroom.**

Education. The new reporting system provides additional detail, including item-level student responses and data. Natomas Charter School will explore the expanded reporting functionality and decide on next steps for introducing the Smarter Balanced Interim Assessments to its campus.

### ***Continue using the practice and training tests to communicate with parents about testing expectations.***

Parents who accessed the practice or training test with their children greatly appreciated the information and the opportunity to better understand the format of the test themselves. Parents provided positive feedback after teachers asked students to work on either the practice or training test at home with them.

## FOR MORE INFORMATION

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**CDE CAASPP Web page**  
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/ta/tg/ca>

**CAASPP Portal**  
<http://www.caaspp.org>