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Governance Brief

2016–17 CAASPP Results for English Language Arts and Mathematics

by Manuel Buenrostro

Introduction

In September, the California Department of Education (CDE) released the results of the 2016–17 Smarter Balanced (SBAC) English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics assessments. Compared to the previous year's results, scores remained relatively flat across all grade levels and student groups, while troubling achievement gaps persist.

This brief examines California's overall student performance in the third year of SBAC testing for ELA and mathematics. The achievement data included can help governance teams consider their scores and progress in view of statewide results. This brief also includes questions that board members might ask to help them understand what local data indicates about the progress of students in their schools, as well as resources they can share with constituents.

This brief will answer the following questions:

- What are the statewide 2016–17 ELA and mathematics test results?
- How do the 2016–17 results compare to those from 2015–16?
- What are the results by student group, and what do they say about achievement gaps?
- What do the results say about college-readiness for 11th-grade students?
- What are questions to consider when analyzing local results?
- What resources are available to communicate results with parents and teachers?

Third Year of Smarter Balanced Assessments

In 2015, California transitioned from the paper-based, multiple-choice Standardized Testing and Assessment tests to the computer-adaptive SBAC for ELA and mathematics. The SBAC tests are based on the Common Core State Standards, which represent a significant change to teaching and learning in California's classrooms. The SBAC tests are part of the broader California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) system, which also consists of California Science Tests (which will be field tested in 2017–18), Standards-based Tests in Spanish, and the California Alternate Assessments (in ELA, mathematics, and science) for students who have the most significant cognitive disabilities.

SBAC results are a critical component of the new California School Dashboard. Specifically, ELA and mathematics results for grades 3-8 are used as indicators of academic achievement within the Dashboard. In addition, California State Universities and many community colleges use 11th-grade SBAC performance to signify readiness for college-level coursework, and these scores will be one of the measures used to calculate school and district performance for the College/Career Indicator that is being developed by the state.

California Student Performance in ELA and Mathematics

In spring 2017, nearly 3.2 million California students took the SBAC assessments for ELA and mathematics. As in the previous three years, less than 1% of eligible students did not participate due to parental exemptions. This reflects the efforts of district, county office of education, and state leaders in

communicating with and engaging parents and stakeholders about the importance of the tests.

Overall, 48.6% of California students in grades 3-8 and 11 met or exceeded grade-level standards in ELA. Performance was considerably lower in mathematics—37.6% of students met or exceeded grade-level standards.

Figure 1: 2016-17 percentage of all students who met or exceeded standards in **ELA**, by grade

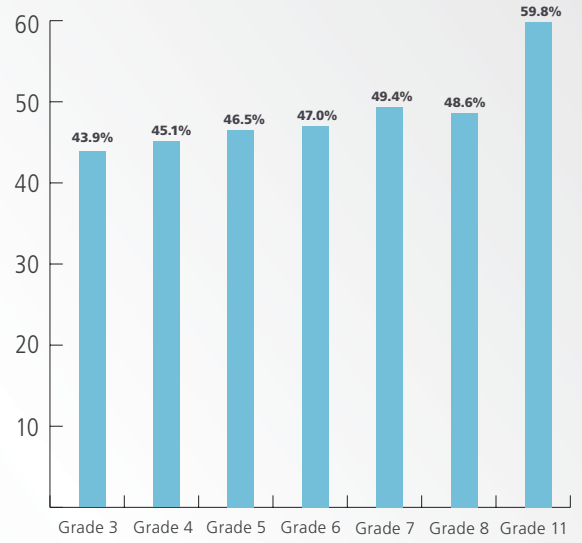
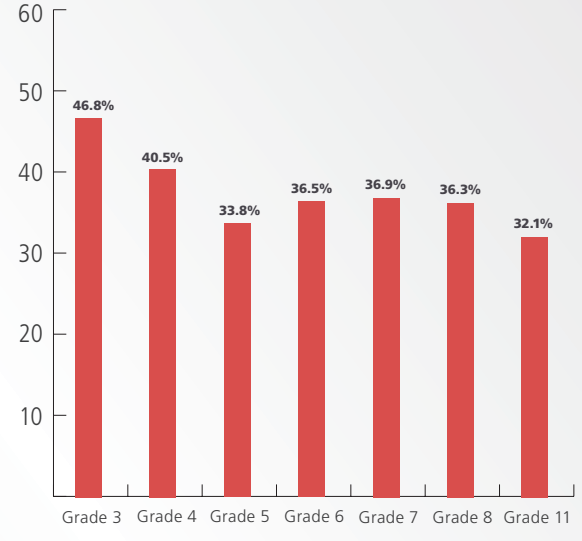


Figure 2: 2016-17 percentage of all students who met or exceeded standards in **mathematics**, by grade



Comparing Performance from the Previous Two Years

This is just the third year of implementation of the SBAC tests, and the Common Core State Standards on which they are based have only recently been fully implemented. Thus, comparisons to previous years' results should be made with caution. Moreover, these results represent just one indicator of student progress for districts and county offices of education to consider. Change takes time, but change with thoughtful monitoring and community engagement can help districts and county offices of education stay focused on their priorities and refine strategies as necessary. Board members have an important role to play in the improvement process by articulating a clear vision and goals for student success, and supporting investments in strategies for closing opportunity and achievement gaps that will help realize these goals.

Across the three years of data, we see that despite the modest gains in performance from 2014–15 to 2015–16, the 2016–17 scores remained flat for most student groups and across most grades. In both ELA and mathematics, the percentage of students who met or exceeded grade-level standards increased by less than one percentage point. ELA had the largest increase in 3rd grade (nearly two percentage points) and the largest drop in 5th grade (two percentage points). Meanwhile, mathematics had the largest increase in 4th grade (two percentage points) and no decreases in the other grades.

Scores also remained flat for most of the reported student groups. However, there were slight improvements, specifically in mathematics where:

» African-American, Latino, and Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander students improved by approximately one percentage point.

» Economically disadvantaged students improved by nearly two percentage points (non-economically disadvantaged students also improved by approximately one percentage point).

Performance by Student Group and Achievement Gaps

The state's achievement gaps—the result of long-standing disparities in educational opportunities—remain troubling. With 2016–17 scores for most student groups remaining flat, there was no significant gap closure. In fact, in both ELA and mathematics the gap widened for English learners (ELs), a troubling development given the state's emphasis on these students in the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF) system.

California can use this data to inform strategies to increase support for historically underserved students. To reduce performance gaps, lower-performing student groups need to improve at a faster rate. The LCFF places particular emphasis on equity for ELs, economically disadvantaged students, and foster youth by providing supplemental and concentration funding to offset the cost of providing additional support for these students. Persistent achievement gaps suggest that districts and county offices of education will need to invest in strategies that result in faster growth for student groups for which there are significant gaps.

Ethnic Groups

In ELA, 75.5% of Asian students, 70.2% of Filipino students, and 64.3% of white students met or exceeded grade-level standards. In contrast, only 37.3% of Latino, 36.1% of American Indian or Alaska Native, and 31.2% of African-American students met or exceeded grade-level standards. There is a staggering 27 percentage-point achievement gap between Latino and white students, and a 33.1 percentage-point achievement gap between African-American and white students.

Students did not perform as well in mathematics, where the gaps are even starker. While 72.7% of Asian, 57.1% of Filipino, and 52.9% of white students met or exceeded grade-level standards in mathematics, only 25.2% of Latino, 25.4% of American Indian or Alaska Native, and 19% of African-American students did the same. These results represent a 27.7 percentage-point achievement gap between Latino and white students, and a 33.8 percentage-point gap between African-American and white students.

Figure 3: 2014–15, 2015–16, and 2016–17 percentage of students who met or exceeded 3rd-8th or 11th-grade standards in **ELA** by ethnicity

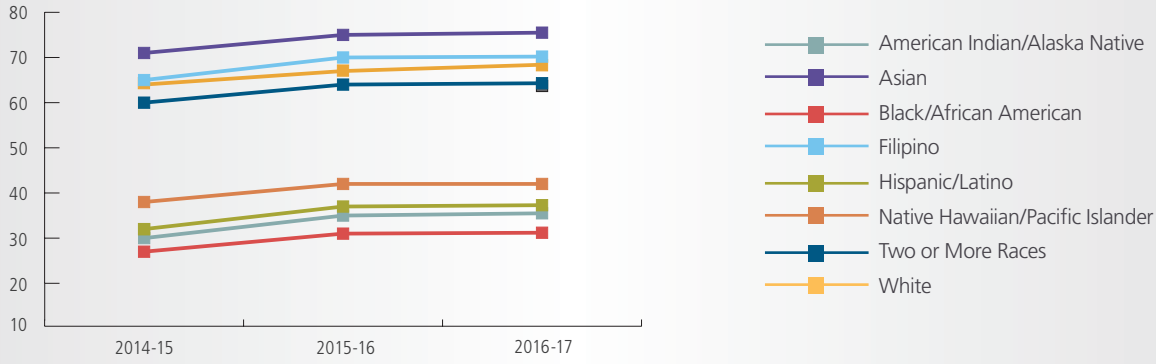
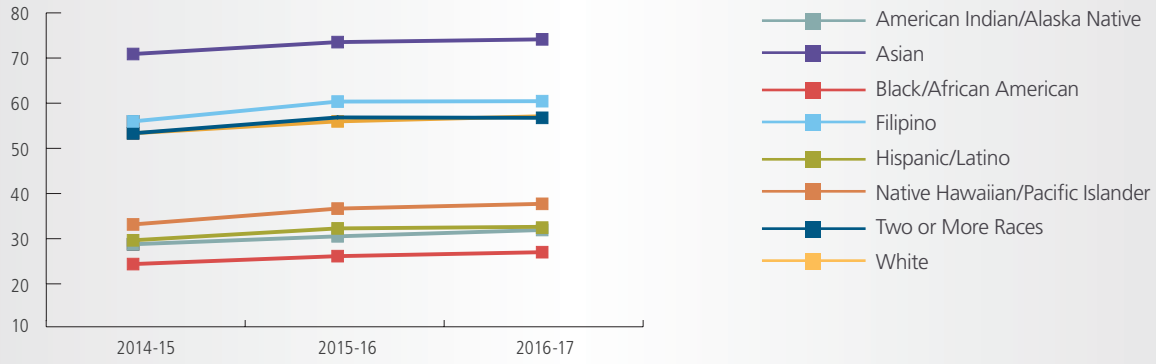


Figure 4: 2014–15, 2015–16, and 2016–17 percentage of students who met or exceeded 3rd-8th or 11th-grade standards in **mathematics** by ethnicity



English Learners

The academic achievement of California's 1.3 million ELs is identified as a policy priority within the LCFF. Therefore, boards should have a clear understanding of how ELs are progressing in their schools. Unlike other student groups, the EL group is not static, with students moving out of the EL category once they have been determined to have achieved English proficiency. Moreover, while the English learner academic indicator in the Dashboard combines ELs and students who were reclassified (RFEPs) within the past four years, boards should consider the achievement of ELs and RFEPs separately in order to more accurately monitor the progress of each group, and to ensure that the progress of RFEPs does not fall off once they are reclassified. When compared to most other student groups, a lower proportion of ELs met or exceeded grade-level standards in both ELA and mathematics.

ELs who have been in U.S. schools for 12 or more months are required to take the ELA test. By definition, ELs are not proficient in English; thus it is not surprising that only 12.1% met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 54.5% of English-only students, and 57.7% of RFEP students. This represents a 42.4 percentage-point gap between EL and English-only students—a significant increase compared to the 2015–16 gap.

All ELs—including those who have been in U.S. schools for less than 12 months—are required to take the mathematics test. Only 12.3% of ELs met or exceeded standards in mathematics compared to 42.6% of English-only students. This represents a 30.3 percentage-point gap between EL and English only students. RFEP students did almost as well as their English-only peers: 40.8% met or exceeded standards.

Of note is the performance of students who come from a household where a language other than English is spoken and who demonstrated English proficiency upon entering school. These are students who have grown up bilingually, and have some level of proficiency—and are often fluent—in a language in addition to English. In both ELA and mathematics, a significantly larger proportion of these initially fluent English proficient (IFEP) students met or exceeded grade-level standards than their English-only peers.

Figure 5. 2014–15, 2015–16, and 2016–17 percentage of students who met or exceeded 3rd-8th or 11th-grade standards in **ELA**, by English language status

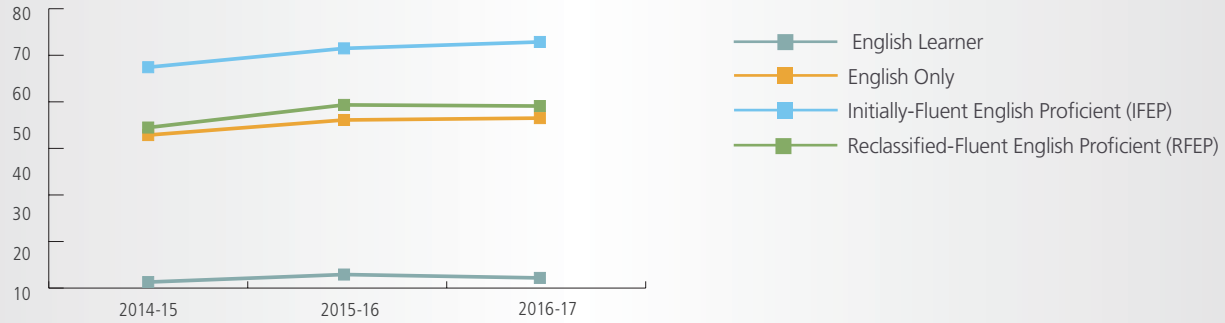
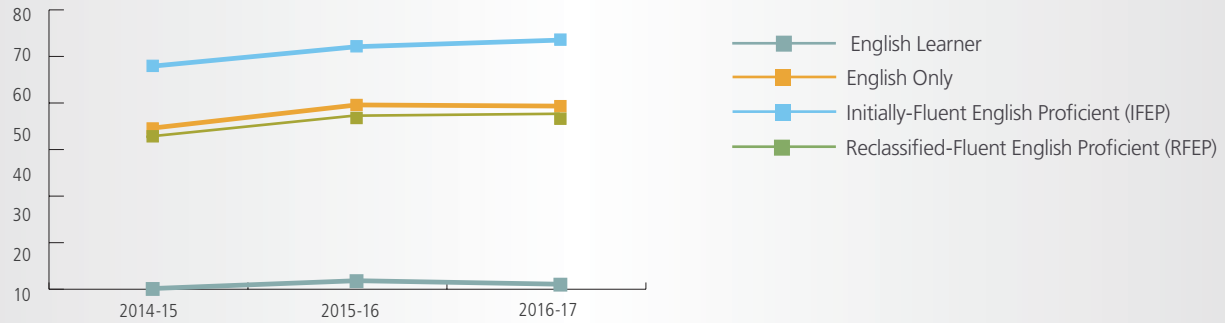


Figure 6. 2014–15, 2015–16, and 2016–17 percentage of students who met or exceeded 3rd-8th or 11th-grade standards in **mathematics**, by English language status



Economically Disadvantaged Students

Also prioritized under LCFF are the state's 3.6 million economically disadvantaged students, defined as students who are eligible for the free and reduced-price meal program. Unfortunately, only about half as many economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded grade-level standards as their non-economically disadvantaged peers.

In ELA, 35.5% of economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 68.4% of non-economically disadvantaged students (a 32.9 percentage-point gap).

In mathematics, 24.6% of economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 57.4% of non-economically disadvantaged students (a 32.8 percentage-point gap).

Students with Disabilities

During the 2016–17 school year, California served over 754,000 children and youth with identified disabilities (birth to age 22). While LCFF does not provide additional funding specific to students who receive special education services, many of these students are also economically disadvantaged, ELs, or foster youth. Moreover, the new Dashboard is designed to hold schools and districts accountable for improving outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities.

In ELA, only 13.9% of students with disabilities met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 52.8% of students with no reported disability (a 39 percentage-point gap).

In mathematics, only 11.1% of students with disabilities met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 40.8% of students with no reported disability (a 29.7 percentage-point gap).

Figure 7. 2014–15, 2015–16, and 2016–17 percentage of students who met or exceeded 3rd-8th or 11th-grade standards in **ELA**, by economic status

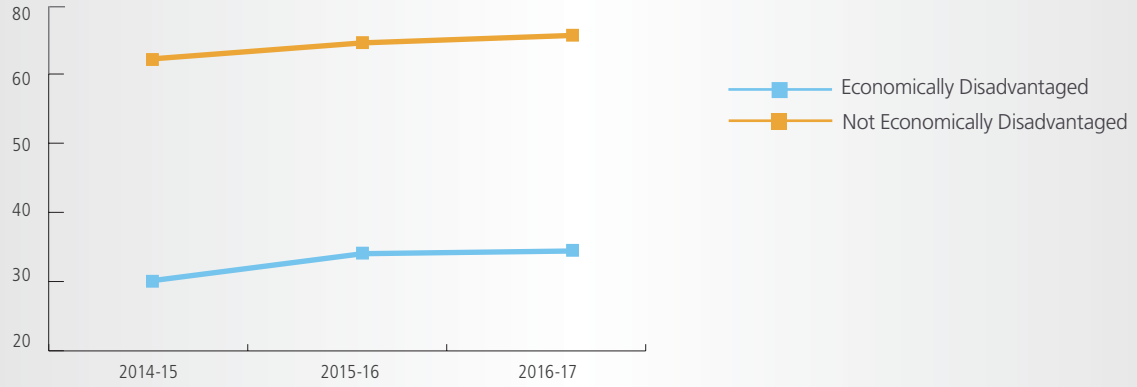


Figure 8. 2014–15, 2015–16, and 2016–17 percentage of students who met or exceeded 3rd-8th or 11th-grade standards in **mathematics**, by economic status

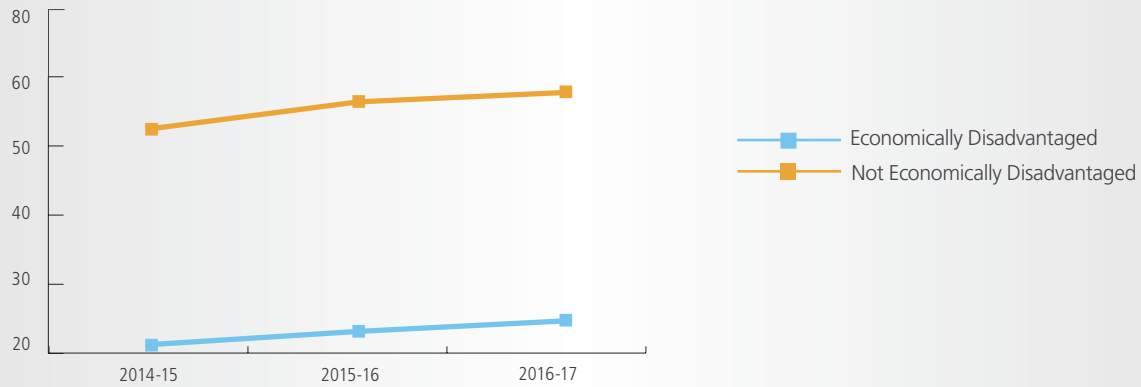


Figure 9. 2014–15, 2015–16, and 2016–17 percentage of students who met or exceeded 3rd-8th or 11th-grade standards in **ELA**, by disability status

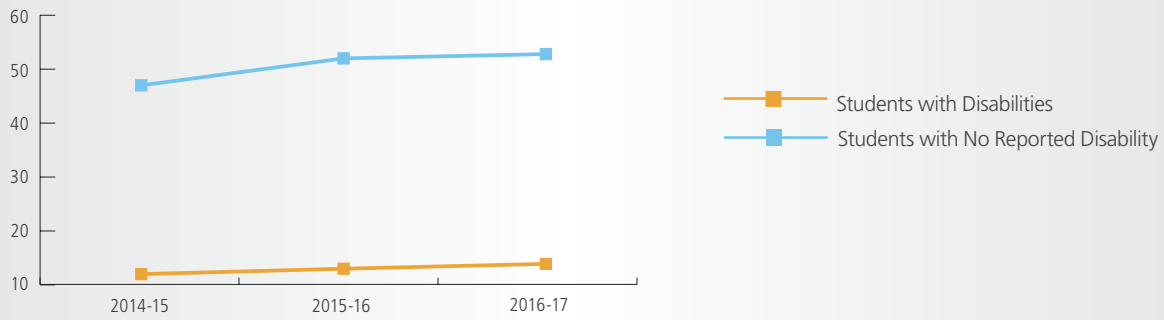
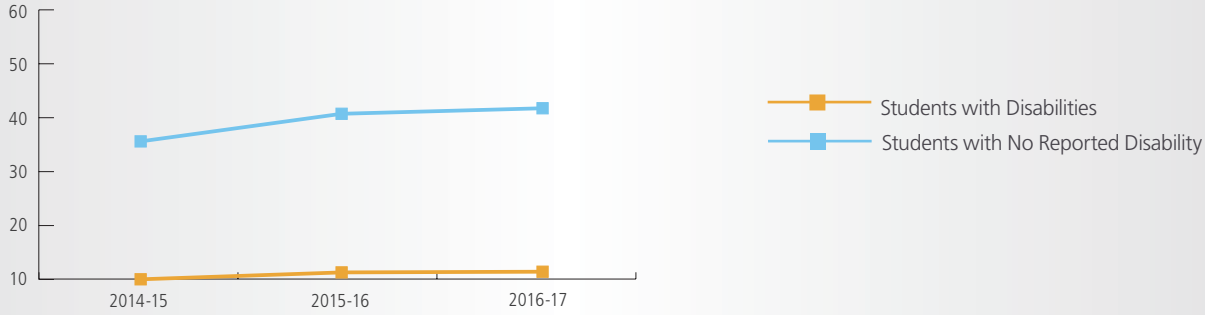


Figure 10. 2014–15, 2015–16, and 2016–17 percentage of students who met or exceeded 3rd-8th or 11th-grade standards in **mathematics**, by disability status



College Readiness

As mentioned earlier, California State Universities and many community colleges use 11th-grade SBAC performance to signify readiness for college-level coursework, and these scores will be one of the measures used to calculate school and district performance for the College/Career Indicator being developed by the state. Therefore, it is particularly important that districts and schools monitor how all student groups perform on this measure.

In ELA, 11th-grade scores indicate that approximately three out of five students met or exceeded grade-level standards, and thus are deemed to be ready or conditionally ready for college-level coursework, while two in five are not ready (see Figure 1). Results for some student groups show significant gaps between their scores and those of the highest-scoring groups. For example, approximately half of 11th-grade Latino, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or American Indian/Alaska Native students and only 41.2% of African-American students met or exceeded standards (see Figure 11).

In mathematics, 11th-grade scores are significantly lower—approximately one in three students met or exceeded grade-level standards, and thus are deemed ready or conditionally ready for college-level coursework, while two in three are not ready (see Figure 2). Again, we see significant gaps between Asian, Filipino, and white students and other student groups. While 70.3% of Asian students, 49% of Filipino students, and 44.5% of white students met grade-level standards—only 19.6% of Latino, 23.9% of American Indian/Alaska Native students, and 14.6% of African-American students met these standards. Far fewer students with disabilities or ELs meet standards, approximately 5% and 6% respectively (see Figure 12).

Figure 11. 2016–17 percentage of students who met or exceeded 11th-grade standards in **ELA**, by ethnicity, English learner, and students with disabilities

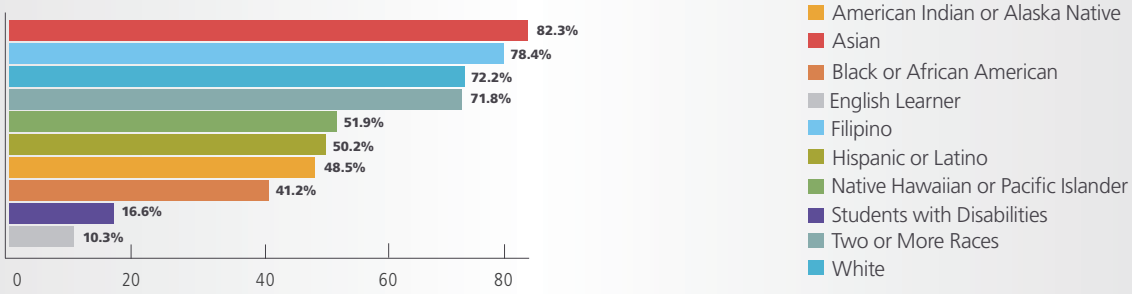
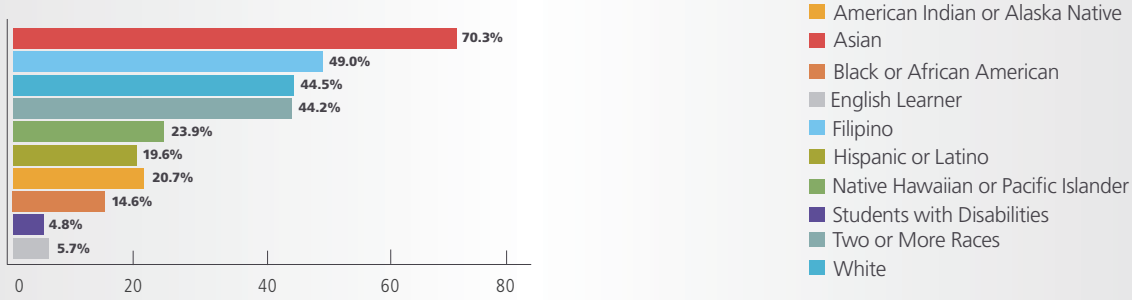


Figure 12. 2016–17 percentage of students who met or exceeded 11th-grade standards in **mathematics**, by ethnicity, English learner, and students with disabilities



Questions for Board Members

This brief focuses on statewide data, but when looking at local results, boards might want to ask a series of important questions about results in their own districts:

Comparisons

» How do our 2016–17 results compare with our performance in 2014–15 and 2015–16?

» What patterns do we observe when looking at performance at the district's individual school sites?

» How does our performance compare to the performance of similar districts and similar schools?

Closing Gaps

» Which student groups have the largest achievement gaps in our district? How does the performance of these student groups in our district compare to their performance in the state, county, and similar districts and schools?

» How are LCFF funds being used to support our lowest performing student groups? Given these results, are adjustments to our goals or budget appropriate?

» When looking at performance across different grade levels and student groups, are there areas that the board should study further? What additional data would be useful?

» If gaps narrowed or widened within our district, what additional information would help our governance team better understand why?

» Are there schools within our district—or our peer schools or districts—that achieved better performance for similar student groups? How can we learn from what these schools and districts have achieved?

Planning and Communication

» How can we use our SBAC results to inform our 2018 LCAP update? To use this data to make strategic decisions, what additional information would we need?

» How can we share these results with the community in a way that will increase stakeholder engagement, involvement, and support for student achievement efforts?

» In communicating results, what are the areas of most concern to the community that might warrant further analysis? What are some areas that should be highlighted and celebrated?

Conclusion

Board members should understand the performance of all of the students in their schools, note where achievement gaps exist, and clearly communicate with their communities about achievements, challenges, and strategies for improving outcomes. Statewide results can help in these efforts by adding context to the performance of students locally. In making such comparisons, we recommend gaining an understanding of district demographics and finding similar peer schools or districts. Ultimately, the goal of using education data should be to support a culture of trust and continuous improvement where challenges are openly acknowledged and responsibility for progress is shared among the board, superintendent, staff, and the community.

Additional Resources

Official CAASPP Site with Results for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics. Allows users to compare test scores across counties, districts, school, or the state on a single screen. It also allows users to view results for 2015–16 alone or alongside 2014–15 results. http://bit.ly/2iPSmLD

EdSource's 2017 Smarter Balanced Test Results Page. Provides a searchable resource for exploring 2017 CAASPP results. http://bit.ly/2lEmVVF

Assessment Fact Sheet. A one-page fact sheet about the SBAC summative assessments, developed by the CDE for families. http://bit.ly/2z54m2m

Online Practice Tests. Provides teachers and students access to online practice tests. http://bit.ly/2z6ZVSs

Smarter Balanced Digital Library. Offers educators subject- and grade-specific resources for formative assessment during daily instruction. The site also allows users to rate materials and collaborate with their peers across the country. It is available to all local educational agencies serving grades K-12. http://bit.ly/2xKJ7iG

CDE Smarter Balanced Resources. Includes information about accessibility and accommodations, and resources such as presentations, frequently asked questions, and fact sheets. http://bit.ly/2inyknV

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