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Governance Brief

2017–18 CAASPP Results for English Language Arts and Mathematics

by Manuel Buenrostro

Introduction

In October, the California Department of Education (CDE) released the results of the 2017–18 Smarter Balanced (SBAC)[1] English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics assessments. Compared to the 2016-17 results, there are slight gains for all student groups. However, significant gaps in performance between student groups remain.

This brief examines California's overall student performance in the fourth year of SBAC testing for ELA and mathematics.[2] 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 about their local data to help them understand the progress of students in their schools, as well as resources they can share with their communities.

Fourth 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 in teaching and learning for 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.

In this brief you will find:

- **An analysis of the statewide 2017–18 ELA and mathematics test results, including:**
  - **How the 2017–18 results compare to those from 2016-17.**
  - **Results by student group, and what they say about achievement gaps.**
  - **What the results say about college-readiness for 11th-grade students.**
- **Questions for board members to consider when analyzing local results.**
- **Resources available to communicate results with parents and teachers.**

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 on 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 2018, nearly 3.2 million California students took the SBAC assessments for ELA and mathematics. Overall, 49.9% of California students in grades 3-8 and 11 met or exceeded grade-level standards in ELA. Performance was considerably lower in mathematics—38.7% of students met or exceeded grade-level standards.

Figure 1: 2017-18 percentage of all students who met or exceeded standards in ELA, by grade

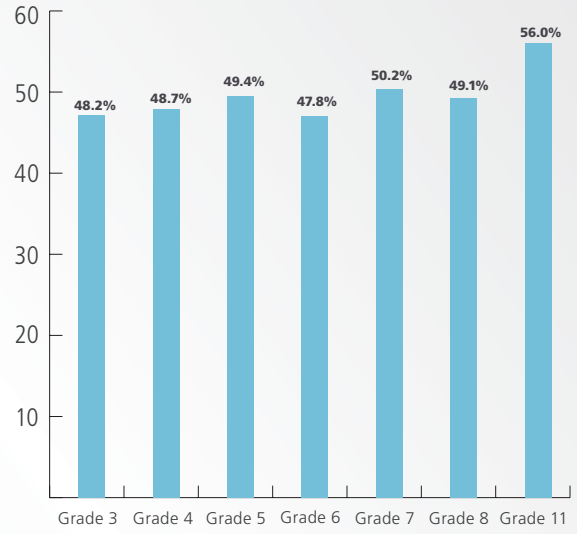
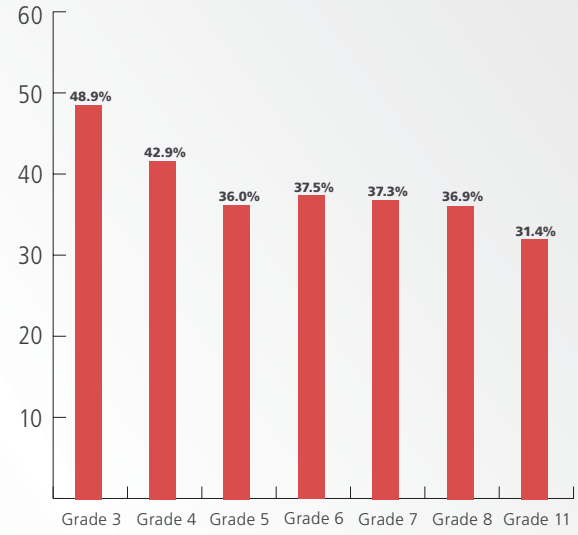


Figure 2: 2017-18 percentage of all students who met or exceeded standards in mathematics, by grade



Comparing Performance from Previous Years

This is the fourth year of implementation of the SBAC tests, and the Common Core State Standards on which they are based have only recently been fully implemented. Moreover, student populations can change from year to year. 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 and 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.

Performance by Student Group and Achievement Gaps

The state's achievement gaps—the result of long-standing disparities in educational opportunities—remain troubling. 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, 76.4% of Asian students, 71.2% of Filipino students, and 64.9% of White students met or exceeded grade-level standards. In contrast, only 39.3% of Latino, 37.4% of Native American, and 32.3% of African-American students met or exceeded grade-level standards. There is a staggering 25.7 percentage-point achievement gap between Latino and White students, and a 32.6 percentage-point achievement gap between African-American and White students—a slight decrease compared to the 2016-17 gaps. These gaps persist across all tested grades, which include 3-8th and 11th grade.

Students did not perform as well in mathematics, where the gaps are even wider. While 73.5% of Asian, 58.5%

Figure 3: 2017–18 percentage of 3rd, 6th, and 11th grade students who met or exceeded standards in ELA, by ethnicity

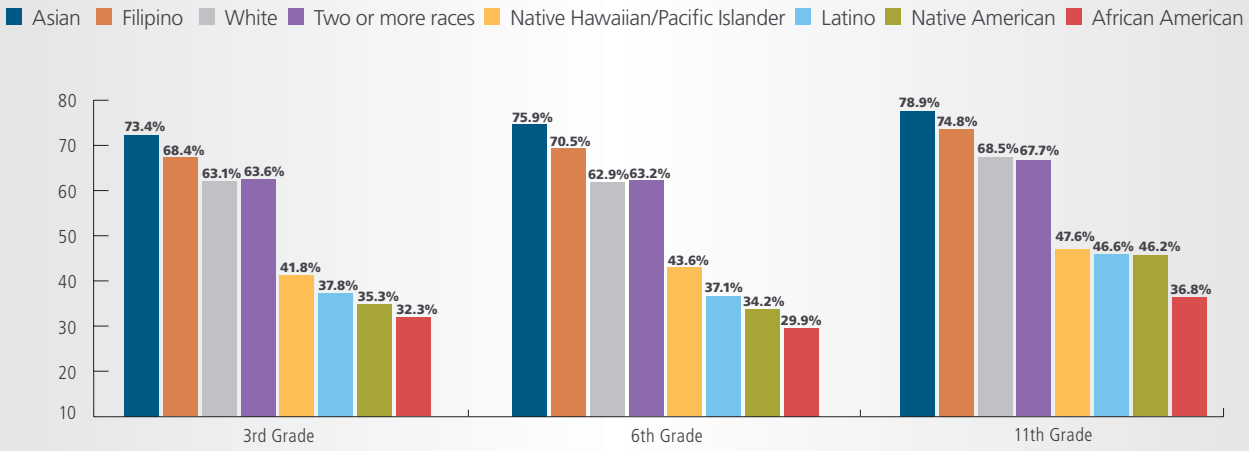
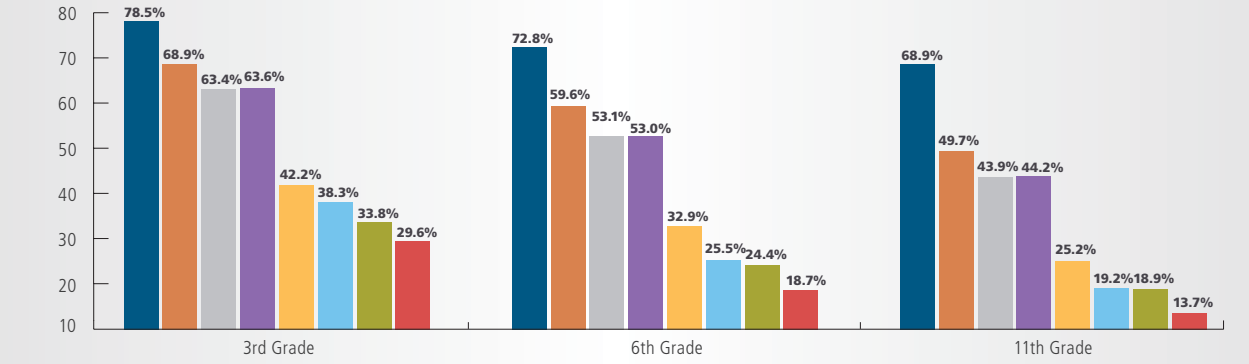


Figure 4: 2017-18 percentage of 3rd, 6th, and 11th grade students who met or exceeded standards in Math, by ethnicity



of Filipino, and 53.6% of White students met or exceeded grade-level standards in mathematics, only 26.6% of Latino, 25.7% of Native American, and 19.7% of African-American students did the same. These results represent a 26.9 percentage-point achievement gap between Latino and White students, and a 33.8 percentage-point gap between African-American and White students—a slight decrease compared to the 2016-17 gap for Latino students and no change for African-American students.

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: new students move into the EL category as they enter school in kindergarten and other grades and out of the EL category as they achieve English proficiency. Moreover, while the English learner academic indicator on 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 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 12.6% met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 55.6% of English-only students, and 58.4% of RFEP students. This represents a 42.9 percentage-point gap between EL and English-only students—a slight widening compared to the 2016–17 gap.

Figure 5. 2017-18 percentage of 3rd, 6th, and 11th grade students who met or exceeded standards in ELA, by English language status

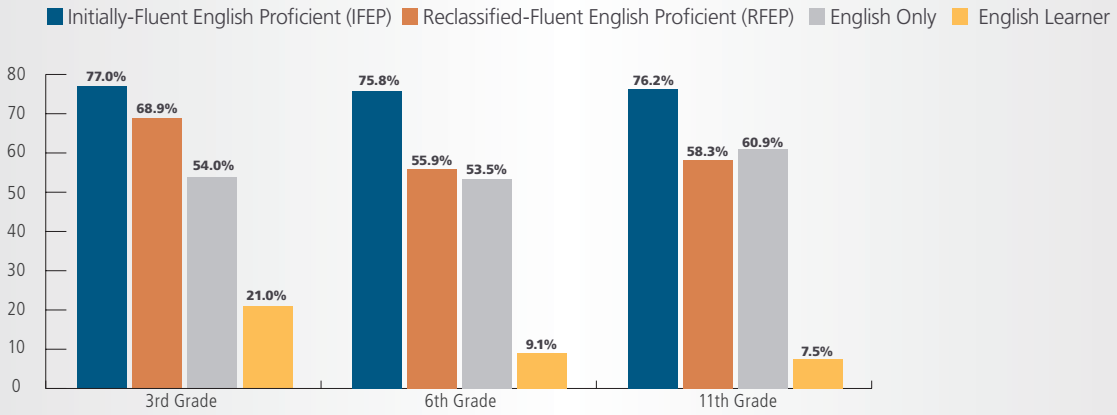
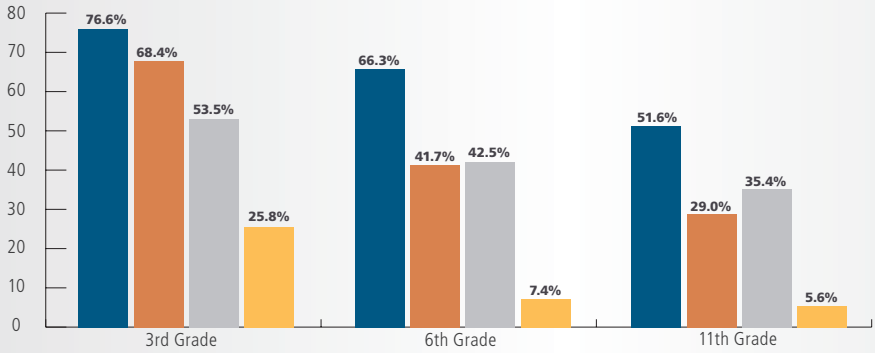


Figure 6. 2017-18 percentage of 3rd, 6th, and 11th grade students who met or exceeded standards in Math, by English language status



All ELs—including those who have been in U.S. schools for less than 12 months—are required to take the mathematics test. Only 12.6% of ELs met or exceeded standards in mathematics compared to 43.5% of English-only students, and 41.5% of RFEP students. This represents a 30.9 percentage-point gap between EL and English only students—a slight increase in the gap compared to 2016–17.

A positive 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, and in all tested grades, a significantly larger proportion of these initially fluent English proficient (IFEP) students met or exceeded standards than their English-only peers.

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, 37.7% of economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 69.3% of non-economically disadvantaged students. This represents a 31.6 percentage-point gap, a narrowing of the 2016-17 school year gap.

In mathematics, 26.2% of economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 58.4% of non-economically disadvantaged students. This represents a 32.2 percentage-point gap and a slight narrowing of the gap from the 2016-17 school year.

Figure 7. 2017-18 percentage of 3rd, 6th, and 11th grade students who met or exceeded standards in ELA, by economic status

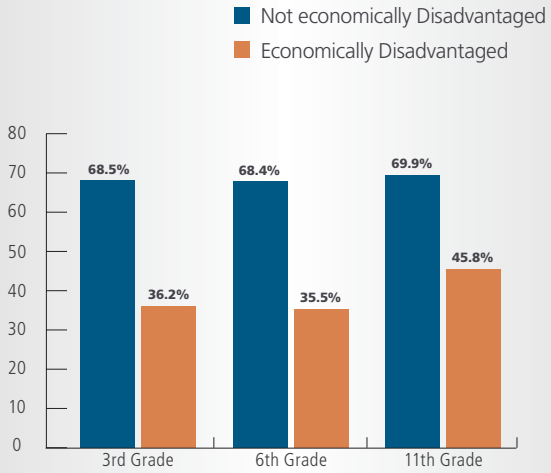


Figure 8. 2017-18 percentage of 3rd, 6th, and 11th grade students who met or exceeded standards in Math, by economic status

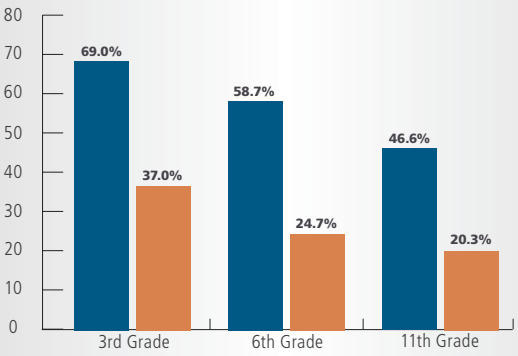


Figure 9. 2017-18 percentage of 3rd, 6th, and 11th grade students who met or exceeded standards in ELA, by disability status

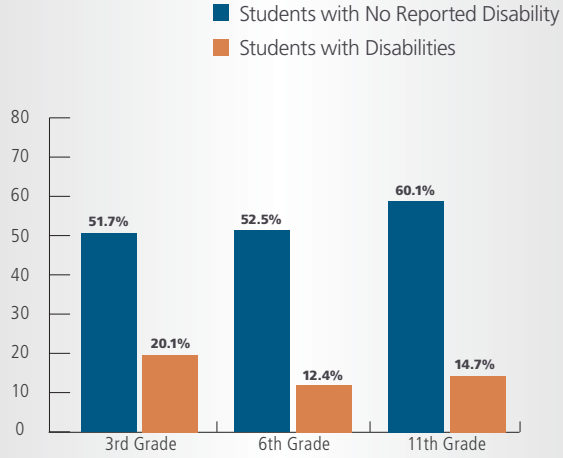
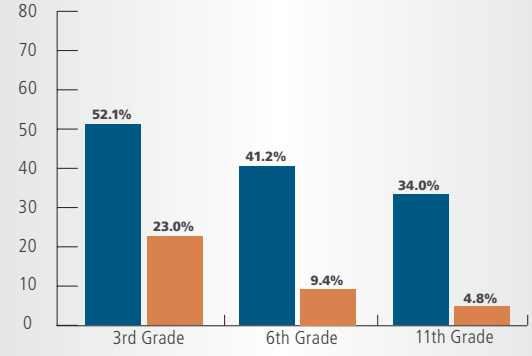


Figure 10. 2017-18 percentage of 3rd, 6th, and 11th grade students who met or exceeded standards in Math, by disability status



Students with Disabilities

During the 2017–18 school year, California served over 774,000 children and youth with identified disabilities (birth to age 22). While LCFF does not provide additional funding specifically for students who receive special education services, many of these students are also economically disadvantaged, ELs, or foster youth. Moreover, the California School Dashboard is designed to hold schools and districts accountable for improving outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities.

In ELA, only 15% of students with disabilities met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 54.3% of students with no reported disability (a 39.3 percentage-point gap).

In mathematics, only 11.9% of students with disabilities met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 42% of students with no reported disability (a 30.1 percentage-point gap). Both gaps for ELA and mathematics represent a slight widening of the gap from the previous year between students with disabilities and their non-disabled peers, even though a larger proportion of students with disabilities met or exceeded grade-level standards.

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 are 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 nearly three of five students met or exceeded grade-level standards, and thus are deemed to be ready or conditionally ready for college-level coursework, while more than 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, less than half of 11th-grade Latino, Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, or Native American students and only 36.8% of African-American students met or exceeded standards (see Figure 3). Far fewer students with disabilities or ELs met standards, approximately 14.7% and 7.5% respectively (see Figures 5 and 9), while less than half of economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded standards.

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 68.9% of Asian students, 49.7% of Filipino students, and 43.9% of White students met grade-level standards—only 19.2% of Latino, 18.9% of Native American, and 13.7% of African-American students met these standards (see Figure 4). Far fewer students with disabilities or ELs meet standards, approximately 4.8% and 5.6% respectively (see Figures 6 and 10), while only one in five economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded standards.

Questions for Board Members

This brief focuses on statewide data but when looking at local data, boards can ask questions about results in their own districts or county offices of education that can help them understand the progress of students in their schools:

Comparisons

» How do our 2017–18 results compare with our performance from previous years?

» 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 or county office of education? How does the performance of these student groups in our district or county office of education compare to their performance in the state 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 or county office of education, what additional information would help our governance team better understand why?

» Are there schools within our district or county office of education 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 2019 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. 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 2016-2017, 2015-16 and 2014-15. https://bit.ly/2Qq7xa4

EdSource's 2018 Smarter Balanced Test Results Page. Provides a searchable resource for exploring 2018 CAASPP results. http://caaspp.edsource.org/

Assessment Fact Sheet. A one-page fact sheet about the SBAC summative assessments, developed by the CDE for families. https://bit.ly/2F7bWxV

Online Practice Tests. Provides teachers and students access to online practice tests. https://bit.ly/1nMHWZR

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. https://bit.ly/2Pgue4o

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

Endnotes

1 The full SBAC acronym stands for Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.

2 All data for this brief is based on a CSBA Analysis of: California Department of Education, California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress. 2018 California statewide research file. Retrieved on Oct. 3, 2018 from https://bit.ly/2DWPk2A.

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