

Student Achievement and Growth on California's K–12 Assessments

April 2017

Iwunze Ugo and Laura Hill

Supported with funding from the Evelyn and Walter Haas, Jr. Fund



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California's education system has undergone a number of major changes

- Smarter Balanced testing is one of the recent K–12 reforms
- Districts have more flexibility to direct spending, but must develop three-year accountability plans
 - Districts with large high-need student populations (English Learners and economically disadvantaged students) get extra state funding
- Closing academic achievement gaps is a major focus

With two years of Smarter Balanced scores, we can better assess student progress

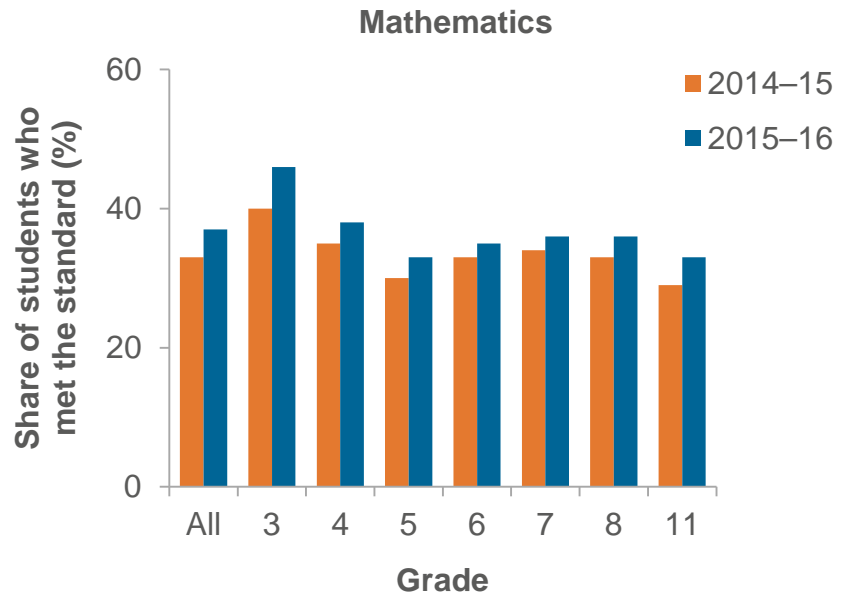
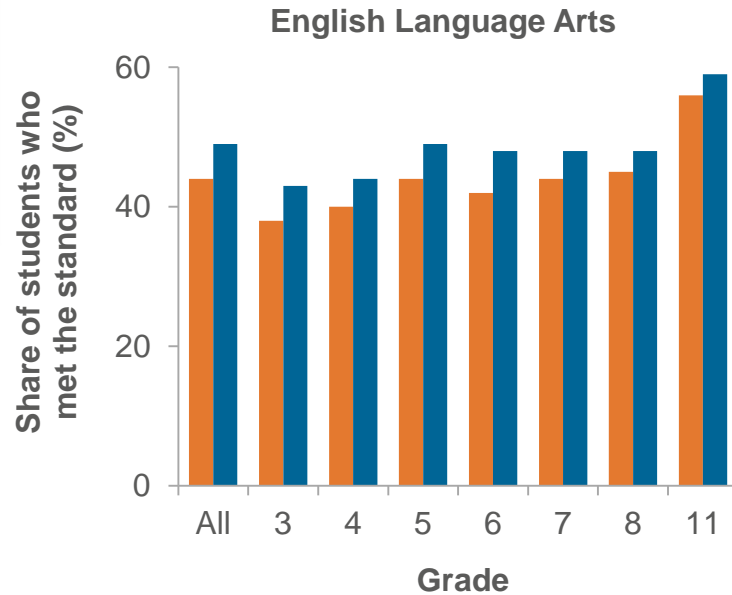
- In the second year of testing, we can measure both achievement and growth
 - To assess achievement, we look at the share of students meeting state standards
 - To assess growth, we look at changes in test scores over time
 - A new state measure combines achievement and growth
- Given the goals of recent reforms, it is important to monitor achievement gaps
- It is also important to look at districts and schools that are performing better or worse than their peers

Outline

- Achievement—how students are doing now
- Growth—how much student scores have improved
- Achievement and growth together
- Looking ahead

More California students met state standards in the second year of testing

Achievement by grade



Focusing on the 4th-to-5th grade cohort

- We track test results for students who were in 4th grade in 2014–15 and in 5th grade in 2015–16
- Following the same group of students allows a better sense of how they are adjusting to the new curriculum and testing
- The 4th-to-5th grade cohort is more useful than other grade spans
 - Students largely remain in the same schools
 - English Learner students are often reclassified during these years

5th-grade test results were similar in other states—and in California's past experience

	Share of students meeting English standard		Share of students meeting math standard	
	Year 1	Year 2	Year 1	Year 2
Smarter Balanced: California	40%	49%	35%	33%
Smarter Balanced: Other states*	51%	55%	46%	40%
California Standards Test (CST)	36%	36%	37%	35%

**Michigan, Washington, Oregon, and Connecticut*

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High-need students saw increases in achievement, but not enough to close gaps with other students

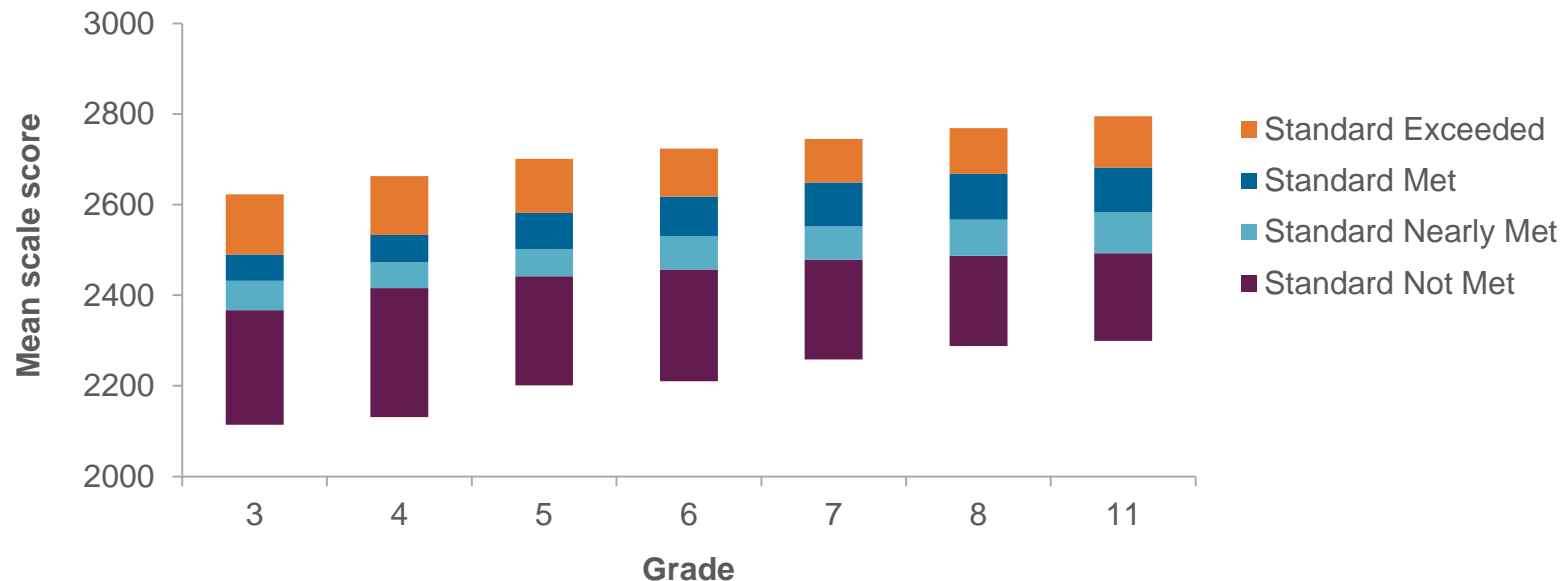
- Larger shares of high-need students met the standard in English
- Economically disadvantaged students: a 10 percentage point increase in achievement narrowed the gap from 36% to 35%
- English Learners: a 2 percentage point increase in achievement widened the gap from 36% to 42%
 - English Learner results are affected by reclassification
 - Combined results for current and reclassified ELs are similar to economically disadvantaged students

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Smarter Balanced scoring allows comparisons over time and across grades

Smarter Balanced achievement levels (English)



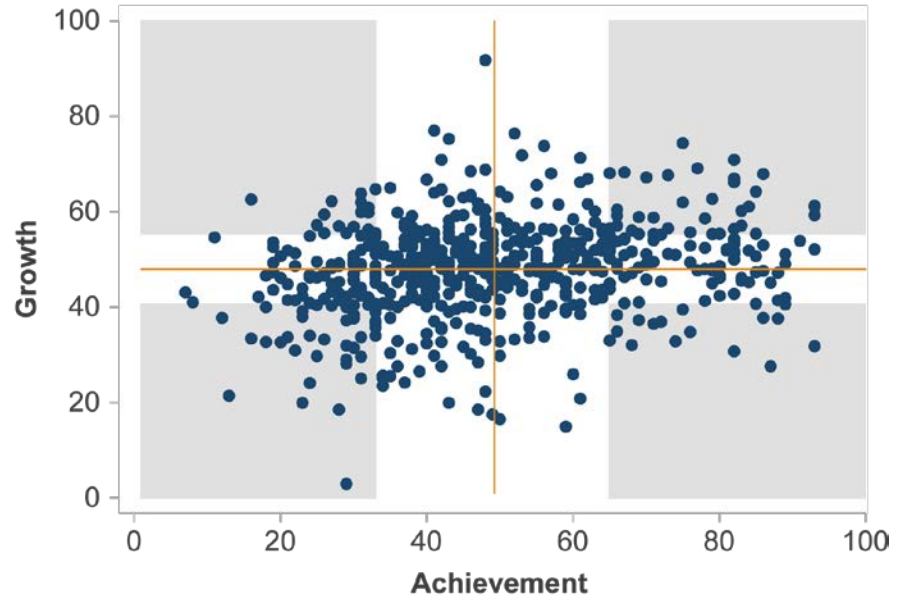
Growth was relatively low for high-need students

- Economically disadvantaged students saw scores increase by 50 points
 - Scores for non-disadvantaged students rose by to 53 points
- English Learner scores increased by 35 points
 - Scores for English-only students increased by 49 points
- Scores for current and reclassified ELs increased by 51 points
 - Some growth is attributable to a higher share of reclassified students in the second year

Achievement and growth vary widely across districts

- High-achievement districts are often high-growth
- Low-achievement districts tend to be low-growth
- Districts that are lagging their peers could be falling further behind

District achievement and growth for 5th graders in English



Schools saw larger shares of students at the extremes than districts

Share of students by district/school type

	Low-achievement, low-growth	Low-achievement, high-growth	High-achievement, low-growth	High-achievement, high-growth
Districts	3.2%	1.7%	0.9%	2.5%
Schools	6.2%	1.9%	2.6%	3.9%

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The state's new academic accountability measure is based on achievement *and* growth

- The new accountability system combines two measures
 - Status: How well students are currently doing
 - Change: How much students have improved compared to previous years
- Performance levels will be applied to a range of areas
 - Academics, graduation rates and college/career readiness, suspension rates, and more
- The new measure includes five color-coded performance levels

The California accountability model

Level	Declined Significantly (Change)	Declined (Change)	Maintained (Change)	Increased (Change)	Increased Significantly (Change)
Very High (Status)	Yellow	Green	Blue	Blue	Blue
High (Status)	Orange	Yellow	Green	Green	Blue
Medium (Status)	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Green	Green
Low (Status)	Red	Orange	Orange	Yellow	Yellow
Very Low (Status)	Red	Red	Red	Orange	Yellow

Low-performing districts and schools have above-average shares of high-need students

Performance levels for 5th-graders in English

	Districts		Schools	
	Share at performance level	Average district share of high-need students at performance level	Share at performance level	Average school share of high-need students at performance level
Blue (highest)	15%	23%	19%	33%
Green	22%	48%	16%	50%
Yellow	47%	78%	38%	80%
Orange	12%	72%	16%	76%
Red (lowest)	4%	80%	11%	86%



Low-performing districts and schools have above-average shares of high-need students

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The share of high-need students is a strong predictor of performance, but there are outlier districts

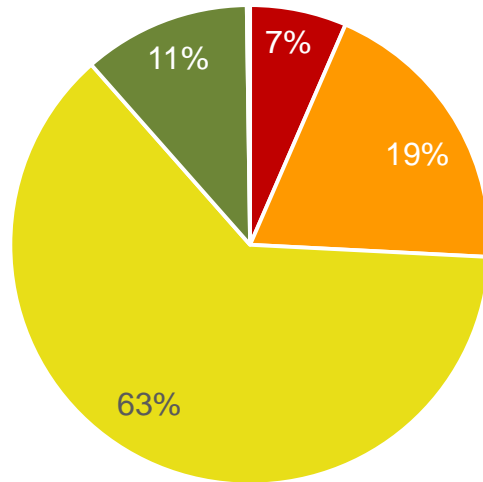
- Some districts exceed expectations
 - The average blue district is 23% high need
 - Two blue elementary school districts—Rosemead (Los Angeles) and Savanna (Orange County)—are 86% and 77% high need
- Other districts fall short
 - Yellow and Orange districts are, on average, 75% high need
 - Two yellow/orange elementary school districts—Rancho Santa Fe (San Diego) and Spreckels Union (Monterey)—are 5% and 15% high need
- Districts that exceeded expectations excelled, while districts that fell short were only slightly below average

Some districts have overperformed for several years

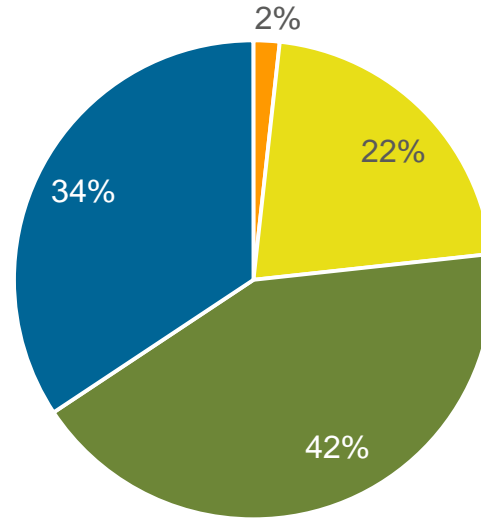
- Five of the 20 districts that most exceeded expectations also did so on the 2014–15 Smarter Balanced tests
- Two districts also exceeded expectations on the 2012–13 CST
- Districts that have had consistent success with high-need students could help other districts close achievement gaps

Struggling schools tend to underperform their districts

District performance levels for low- and high-performing schools



Red schools
(lowest performance level)



Blue schools
(highest performance level)

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Smarter Balanced results reveal ongoing challenges and hopeful signs

- Student achievement improved in the second year of tests
 - California is catching up to other states
 - Early Smarter Balanced results are better than the early CST results
- Low-achievement districts are often also low-growth, but there are exceptions
- High-need students saw improvements but are behind their peers in achievement and growth

High-need students remain a focus for improvement

- Districts with large shares of high-need students will need support to improve student outcomes
 - The state is developing resources to support improvement efforts
 - High-performing districts with large shares of high-need students could provide examples of best practices
- English Learner reclassification policy will need to account for difficulties ELs have had with the new tests
- Other state indicators are an important part of the new system

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Notes on the use of these slides

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Thank you for your interest in this work.