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Governance Brief

2018–19 CAASPP Results for English Language Arts and Mathematics

By Manuel Buenrostro

Introduction

In October 2019, the California Department of Education (CDE) released the results of the 2018–19 Smarter Balanced (SBAC)[1] English language arts/literacy (ELA) and mathematics assessments. Compared to the 2017–18 results, all student groups performed slightly better. However, significant achievement gaps remain between student groups.

This brief examines California's overall student performance in the fifth year of SBAC testing for ELA and mathematics.[2] The achievement data can help governance teams consider their scores and progress in view of statewide results. This brief also includes questions that board members can 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 about assessment results.

In this brief you will find:

- An analysis of the statewide 2018–19 ELA and mathematics test results, including:
  - A comparison of the 2018–19 results to those from 2017–18.
  - Results by student group, including achievement gaps.
  - Results for 11th-grade students, and implications for college readiness.
- Questions for board members to consider when analyzing local results.
- Resources available to communicate results with parents and teachers.

Fifth Year of Smarter Balanced Assessments

In 2015, California transitioned from the paper-based, multiple-choice Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) exams 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 the California Science Test (which was fully administered for the first time in 2018-19), 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 California School Dashboard. Specifically, ELA and mathematics results for grades 3-8 are used as indicators of academic achievement. In addition, California State Universities and many community colleges use 11th-grade SBAC results to signify readiness for college-level coursework, and SBAC scores are some of the measures used to calculate school and district performance for the College/Career Indicator on the Dashboard.

California Student Performance in ELA and Mathematics

In spring 2019, nearly 3.2 million California students took the SBAC assessments for ELA and mathematics. Half (50.1 percent) of students in grades 3-8 and 11 met or exceeded grade-level standards in ELA. Performance was considerably lower in mathematics—39.7 percent of students met or exceeded grade-level standards.

Figure 1: 2018-19 percentage of all students who met or exceeded standards in ELA, by grade

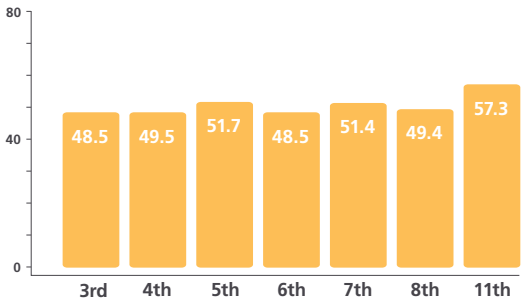
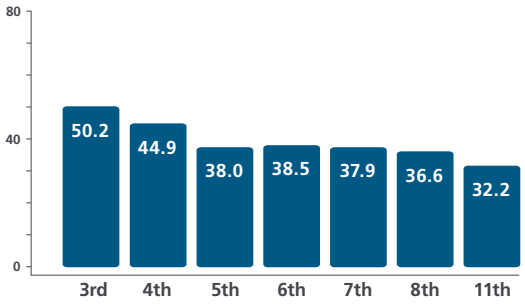


Figure 2: 2018-19 percentage of all students who met or exceeded standards in math, by grade



Comparing Performance from Previous Years: A Snapshot, Not Growth

This is the fifth year of implementation of the SBAC tests, providing districts, county offices of education, and schools with several years of data to analyze. It is important to note that scores from each year represent a snapshot of student performance. Changes from one year to the next do not consider differences in the composition of cohorts of students. Therefore, while these scores are useful at evaluating how students from any given year performed in comparison to those in prior years, they do not measure growth in student learning. Such a measurement would require a state-adopted growth model, which would look at how much students in the same cohort (grade level) have grown from one year to the next. California and Kansas are the only two states in the nation that do not calculate and report student outcomes with a growth model. However, the State Board of Education has been evaluating options for a growth measure, with the possibility of including it in the California School Dashboard as early as December 2020.

It is important to note that these results represent just one indicator of student outcomes. 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 play a critical role in the improvement process by articulating a clear vision and goals for student success and supporting investments in strategies for closing opportunity gaps.

Performance by Student Group and Achievement Gaps

The state's achievement gaps—the result of long-standing disparities in educational opportunities—remain troubling. Districts and county offices of education must continue to invest in strategies that support historically underserved students. These investments are a central part of the Local Control Funding Formula (LCFF), which provides supplemental and concentration funding for English Learners (ELs), economically disadvantaged students, and foster youth.

Ethnic Groups

In ELA, 76.9 percent of Asian students, 71.4 percent of Filipino students, and 65.4 percent of White students met or exceeded grade-level standards. In contrast, only 40.6 percent of Latino, 38.2 percent of Native American, and 33 percent of African American students met or exceeded grade-level standards. There is a staggering 24.8 percentage-point achievement gap between Latino and White students, and a 32.4 percentage-point achievement gap between African American and White students—a slight decrease compared to the 2017–18 gaps. These gaps persist across all tested grades, comprising 3-8 and 11 *(Figure 3)*.

Students did not perform as well in mathematics, where the gaps are even wider. While 74.4 percent of Asian, 59.5 percent of Filipino, and 54.2 percent of White students met or exceeded grade-level standards in mathematics,

Figure 3: 2018-19 percentage of 3rd-, 6th-, and 11th-grade students who met or exceeded standards in ELA, by ethnicity

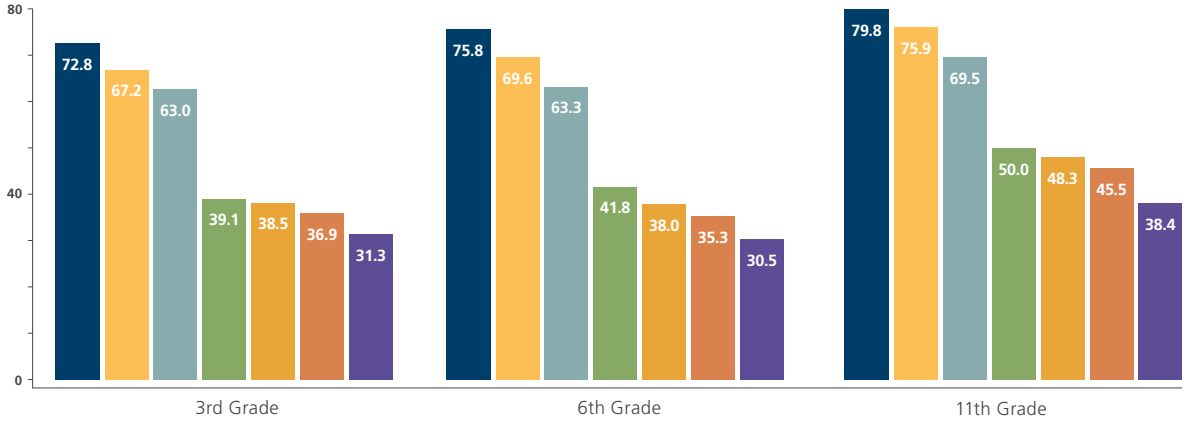
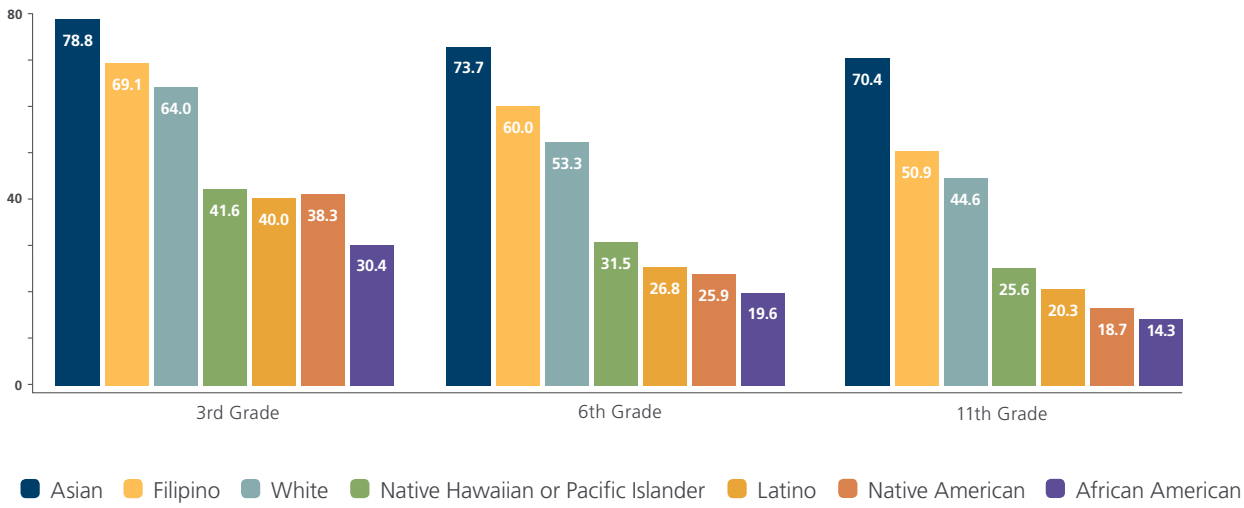


Figure 4: 2018-19 percentage of 3rd-, 6th-, and 11th-grade students who met or exceeded standards in Math, by ethnicity



only 28.1 percent of Latino, 26.6 percent of Native American, and 20.5 percent of African American students did the same. These results represent a 26.1 percentage-point achievement gap between Latino and White students, and a 33.7 percentage-point gap between African American and White students—a slight decrease compared to the 2017–18 gaps *(Figure 4)*.

English Learners

The academic achievement of California's 1.2 million ELs is a policy priority within the LCFF. Therefore, district and county boards should have a clear understanding of the level at which ELs are achieving in their schools. The EL student group is unique in that new students move into the EL category as they enter school and out of the category as they achieve English proficiency. Moreover, while the English learner academic indicator on the California School Dashboard combines ELs and reclassified fluent English proficient students (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 12.7 percent met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 56.2 percent of English-only students, and 59.8 percent of RFEP students. This represents a 43.5 percentage-point gap between EL and English-only students—a slight widening for the second consecutive year and compared to the 2017–18 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 12.6 percent of ELs met or exceeded standards in mathematics compared to 44.4 percent of English-only students, and 43.1 percent of RFEP students. This represents a 31.8 percentage-point gap between EL and English-only students—a slight increase in the gap compared to 2017–18 and widening for the second consecutive year *(Figure 6)*.

A positive note from the results 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 bilingual. 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.

Figure 5: 2018-19 percentage of 3rd-, 6th-, and 11th-grade students who met or exceeded standards in ELA, by English language status

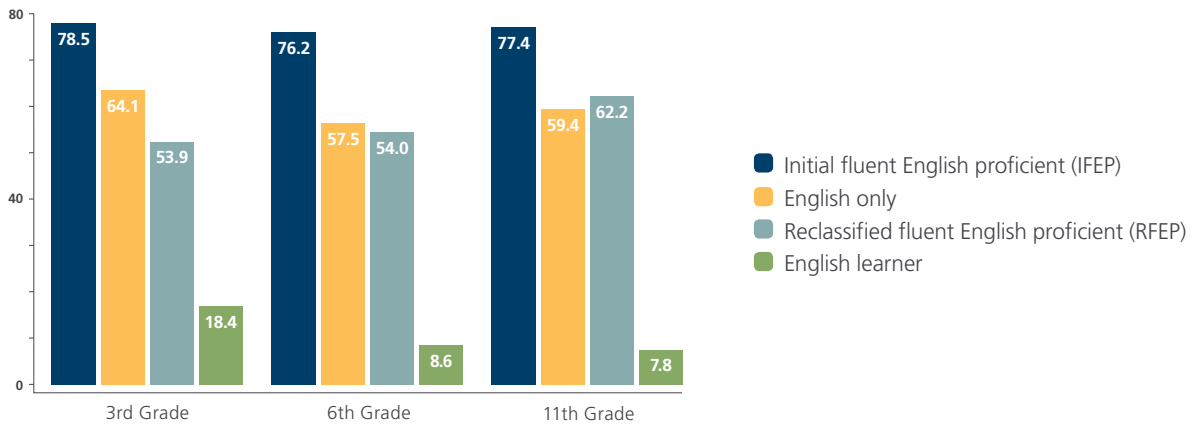
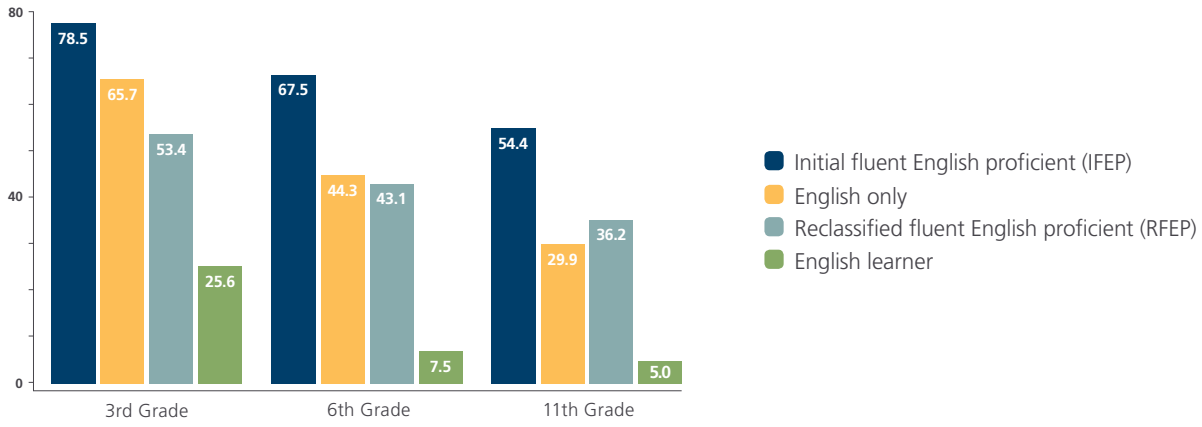


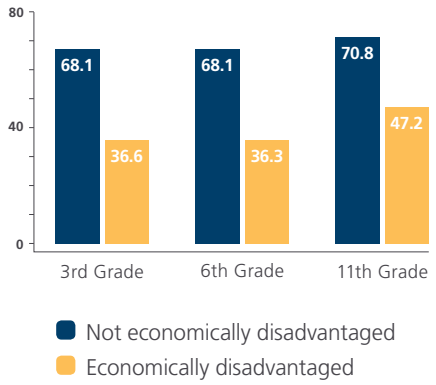
Figure 6: 2018-19 percentage of 3rd-, 6th-, and 11th-grade students who met or exceeded standards in Math, by English language status



Economically Disadvantaged Students

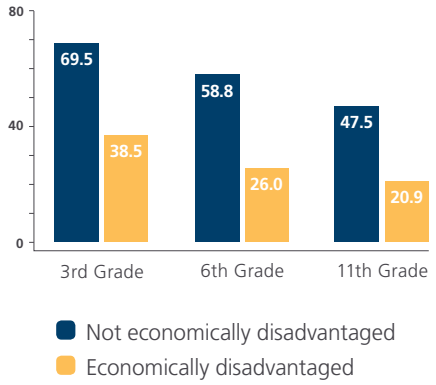
Also prioritized under LCFF are the state's more than 3.7 million economically disadvantaged students, defined as students who are eligible for the free and reduced-price meal program. Unfortunately, only about half as many economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded grade-level standards as their non-economically disadvantaged peers.

Figure 7: 2018-19 percentage of 3rd-, 6th-, and 11th-grade students who met or exceeded standards in ELA, by economic status



In ELA, 39 percent of economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 69.5 percent of non-economically disadvantaged students. This represents a 30.5 percentage-point gap, a narrowing of the 2017–18 school year gap and a reduction for the second consecutive year *(Figure 7)*.

Figure 8: 2018-19 percentage of 3rd-, 6th-, and 11th-grade students who met or exceeded standards in Math, by economic status

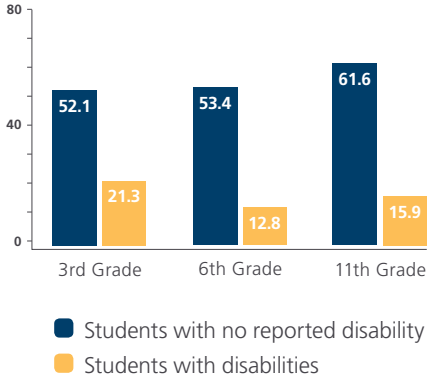


In mathematics, 27.5 percent of economically disadvantaged students met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 58.9 percent of non-economically disadvantaged students. This represents a 31.4 percentage-point gap and a slight narrowing of the gap from the 2017–18 school year *(Figure 8)*.

Students with Disabilities

During the 2018–19 school year, California served more than 795,000 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 California School Dashboard is designed to hold schools, districts, and county offices of education accountable for improving outcomes for all students, including those with disabilities. In fact, two in three districts identified for differentiated assistance in 2017–18, were identified, at least in part, due to their performance with students with disabilities.

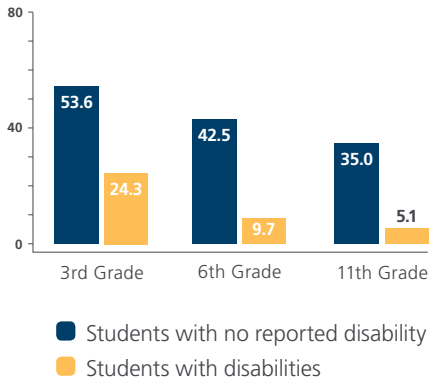
Figure 9: 2018-19 percentage of 3rd-, 6th-, and 11th-grade students who met or exceeded standards in ELA, by disability status



In ELA, only 16.3 percent of students with disabilities met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 55.4 percent of students with no reported disability. This represents a 39.1 percentage-point gap, a slight narrowing from the previous year *(Figure 9)*.

In mathematics, only 12.6 percent of students with disabilities met or exceeded grade-level standards, compared to 43.3 percent of students with no reported disability. This represents a 30.7 percentage-point gap, a slight widening from the previous year *(Figure 10)*.

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



College Readiness

As mentioned earlier, California State Universities and many community colleges use 11th-grade SBAC results to signify readiness for college-level coursework, and SBAC performance is one of the measures used to calculate school and district performance for the College/Career Indicator on the Dashboard. 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 three 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, only 50 percent of Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander, 48.3 percent of Latino, 45.5 percent of Native American, and 38.4 percent of African American 11th-grade students met or exceeded standards *(Figure 3)*. Far fewer students with disabilities or ELs met standards, approximately 15.9 percent and 7.8 percent respectively *(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 *(Figure 2)*. Again, we see significant gaps between Asian, Filipino, and White students and other student groups. While 70.4 percent of Asian, 50.9 percent of Filipino, and 44.6 percent of White students met grade-level standards—only 20.3 percent of Latino, 18.7 percent of Native American, and 14.3 percent of African American students met these standards *(Figure 4)*. Far fewer students with disabilities or ELs met standards, approximately 5.1 percent and 5 percent respectively *(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. 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 their students:

Comparisons

1. How do our 2018–19 results compare with our performance from previous years?
2. What patterns do we observe when looking at performance at the district or county office's individual school sites?
3. How does our performance compare to the performance of similar districts or county offices and similar schools?

Closing Gaps

1. Which student groups have the largest achievement gaps in our district or county office? How does the performance of these student groups in our district or county office compare to their performance in the state, county, and similar districts or county offices and schools?
2. How are we using LCFF funds and other resources to support our lowest performing student groups? Are adjustments to our goals or budget appropriate?
3. If gaps narrowed or widened within our district or county office, what additional information would help our governance team better understand why?
4. Are there schools within our district or county office—or our peer schools or districts—that achieved better performance for similar student groups? How can we learn from what these schools and districts or county offices have achieved?

Planning and Communication

1. How can we use our SBAC results to inform our 2020 Local Control and Accountability Plan? What additional information would we need to use this data to make strategic decisions?
2. How can we share these results with the community in a way that will increase stakeholder engagement, involvement, and support for student achievement efforts?
3. 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 progress, 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.

Resources

Official CAASPP Site with Results for English Language Arts/Literacy and Mathematics. Allows users to compare test scores across counties, districts, schools, or the state on a single screen. It also allows users to view results for previous years. http://bit.ly/35q4arl

EdSource's 2019 Smarter Balanced Test Results Page. Provides a searchable resource for exploring 2019 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. 2018-19 California statewide research file. Retrieved on Oct. 9, 2019 from http://bit.ly/2q2C0TI*

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