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Education Commissioner McCollum Calls First Year of New Assessment Results a Starting Point for Measuring Students' Progress Toward College and Career Readiness

ST. THOMAS, USVI–Virgin Islands Department of Education Commissioner Dr. Sharon Ann McCollum today announced a new starting point for how Virgin Islands public school students are performing academically. The territory-wide results for the 2014-15 Smarter Balanced Assessments and National Center and State Collaborative (NCSC) Alternate Assessments are the first results aligned with the Virgin Islands' new, higher standards and provide teachers and parents with more accurate information of how students are performing on the path to success after high school.

This past spring, 8,859 students enrolled in grades 3-11 participated in the Smarter Balanced online summative assessments. Smarter Balanced Assessments evaluate student progress on the Virgin Islands' standards in mathematics and English language arts/literacy—more specifically referred to as Common Core College and Career Readiness Standards. Additionally, 78 students participated in the NCSC Alternate Assessment aligned to alternate Common Core College and Career Readiness Standards. Since the student test scores released today establish a new baseline aligned with the College and Career Readiness Standards, they should not be compared to test scores previously reported in the Virgin Islands, namely VITAL-S and VITAL-A test scores. As with any change, there will be a period of adjustment, as teachers and students become familiar with the new standards and tests.

“These results usher in a new era for Virgin Islands public education and is a first glance into where Virgin Islands' students are with meeting more rigorous academic standards that focus on critical

thinking, problem solving and analytical writing,” Commissioner McCollum said. “The Virgin Islands’ new standards and tests raise the bar for both teachers and students. As we expected, students need to make more progress. We are committed to supporting students, teachers and schools to ensure their success.”

THE SCORES

On the College and Career Readiness Standards aligned tests, students’ scores are organized into one of four categories: exceeded standard, met standard, near standard and below standard.

Territory-wide in all grades, 17 percent of students met or exceeded the English language arts standards and 7 percent met or exceeded the mathematics standards. These scores reflect those of the Smarter Balanced assessment and the NCSC alternate assessment.

Virgin Islands Department of Education

2014-2015 Assessment Proficiency Rate

Smarter Balanced and the National Center and State Collaborative Assessment
English Language Arts/Literacy
Territory

	Percent of Students tested who scored in each performance level					Percentage of students tested who scored
Grades	Students Tested	Below Standard	Near Standard	Met Standard	Exceeded Standard	Met and Exceeded Standard
Grade 3	1064	65.0%	22.3%	9.2%	3.5%	12.7%
Grade 4	1042	70.5%	17.2%	8.8%	3.5%	12.3%
Grade 5	1072	65.6%	18.6%	12.3%	3.5%	15.9%
Grade 6	1020	51.8%	30.3%	15.4%	2.5%	17.9%
Grade 7	1108	64.9%	20.5%	12.8%	1.8%	14.6%
Grade 8	1029	52.1%	29.8%	16.1%	1.9%	18.1%
Grade 11	818	41.0%	29.0%	23.5%	6.6%	30.1%

Virgin Islands Department of Education

2014-2015 Assessment Proficiency Rate

Smarter Balanced and the National Center and State Collaborative Assessment
Mathematics
Territory

	Percent of Students tested who scored in each performance level					Percentage of students tested who scored
Grades	Students Tested	Below Standard	Near Standard	Met Standard	Exceeded Standard	Met and Exceeded Standard
Grade 3	1067	69.7%	21.3%	8.1%	0.9%	9.0%
Grade 4	1063	69.7%	24.7%	5.2%	0.4%	5.6%
Grade 5	1080	80.1%	15.9%	2.5%	1.5%	4.0%
Grade 6	1028	73.5%	19.6%	5.7%	1.1%	6.8%
Grade 7	1114	75.8%	18.9%	4.6%	0.7%	5.3%
Grade 8	1033	75.4%	18.3%	4.7%	1.5%	6.3%
Grade 11	824	74.0%	15.7%	8.0%	2.3%	10.3%

WHAT THE SCORES MEAN AND WHAT THEY DO NOT MEAN

A change in the percent of students who met standards does not mean schools are performing worse or that students are learning less. Instead, this is a reflection of the higher standards the Virgin Islands have adopted to ensure students achieve 21st century college and career readiness.

Virgin Islands first-year assessment results tell us the following:

- The Virgin Islands adopted the College and Career Readiness Standards in 2010, but began full implementation during the 2013-14 school year. At the time of testing, students and teachers had been navigating the rigor of the standards for only two years. We expect students' confidence to be reflected on the assessments as they become more familiar with the rigor of the standards in the ensuing years.
- Students who have scored at the near standard level have great potential of meeting standards as they and their teachers become more familiar with the rigor of the new way of learning and excelling.
- Technological setbacks experienced at the school level during testing may have played some role in student performance. The Department is in the process of upgrading its technology to ensure students can more effortlessly navigate the online tests.

"This is the first time that performance tasks were administered as part of the territory's end of year assessment. In English, students now have to apply their research and writing skills, and in math, they

solve complex problems and then describe and defend their reasoning. As teachers spend more time focusing on the content outlined in the new standards and students gain more practice with the skills, the scores are expected to improve,” State Assessment Director Alexandria Baltimore-Hookfin stated. “It is better to have our students challenged now—with teachers there to help—so they can be fully prepared when they enroll in college or seek to enter the workforce.”

While no single test can give a complete picture of achievement, annual assessments can provide important information about student progress and areas for improvement, especially when combined with student grades and teacher reports. Parents and teachers can use this information to make sure students get the support they need to succeed.

WHAT WE ARE DOING TO IMPROVE

- Smarter Balanced is more than an end-of-year assessment. The balanced assessment system also includes interim assessments and instructional resources for educators. During the 2015-16 school year, teachers and school administrators will continue to utilize the Smarter Balanced interim assessments which are designed to improve and promote teaching and learning by providing information that can be used to monitor student progress toward mastery of the College and Career Readiness Standards. These interim assessments are available to all third through twelfth (3–12) grade teachers in English language arts and mathematics.
- Monthly student early-release days allow teachers to come together for dedicated time to plan lessons that are aligned to the College and Career Readiness Standards
- Educators have ongoing support from each district’s Professional Development Program Manager and Content Coordinators whose roles are to assist teachers with understanding the College and Career Readiness Standards and implementing instructional strategies aligned to them
- Teachers and administrators have access to a variety of online resources, which consist of tools and practices designed to help them with the implementation of the College and Career Readiness Standards
- The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) provides ongoing technical support for districts through its various topical meetings in cities across the country and bi-monthly online newsletters offering webinars, lesson planning, resources for parents, best-practices and more

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