



by Donita Joens, Iowa Valley CSD Superintendent

Beginning in the 2017-2018 school year, Iowa students will soon be assessed using a new statewide tool called Smarter Balanced. It is a new name and new future assessment; who can argue with the name, as we all want to be smarter and live a more balanced life, right? Let's hope this is the outcome for the students of Iowa.

Most of us probably grew up taking Iowa Assessments, ITEDs, or Basic Skills. Most of the test questions were simply multiple choice-type questions, selecting one of four responses listed. Smarter Balanced assessments will be formatted differently for a variety of reasons. Smarter Balanced assessment will hopefully do the following:

- Better reflect what is taught in the classroom
- Showcase mastery of skills in a more detailed manner with immediate results
- Challenge the thinking process for solving real-life problems
- Require deeper thinking and responses
- Provide accurate information about whether students are on track
- Assure that students are more “future ready”

Because Iowa raised the expectation bar, Smarter Balanced will be added beginning next year if legislators work through the funding issues, as they are more costly than previous types of assessments. Parents are encouraged to take the Smarter Balanced practice tests by visiting:  
[www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/practice-and-training-tests](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/assessments/practice-and-training-tests).

As we all know, Smarter Balanced should be used in combination with teacher observations, grades, ability to problem solve, skills to work with others, and creative thinking strategies to develop a true picture of a student's progress. We hope the state's new assessment tool will boost student achievement and give us a better “picture” of what students know and are able to do.