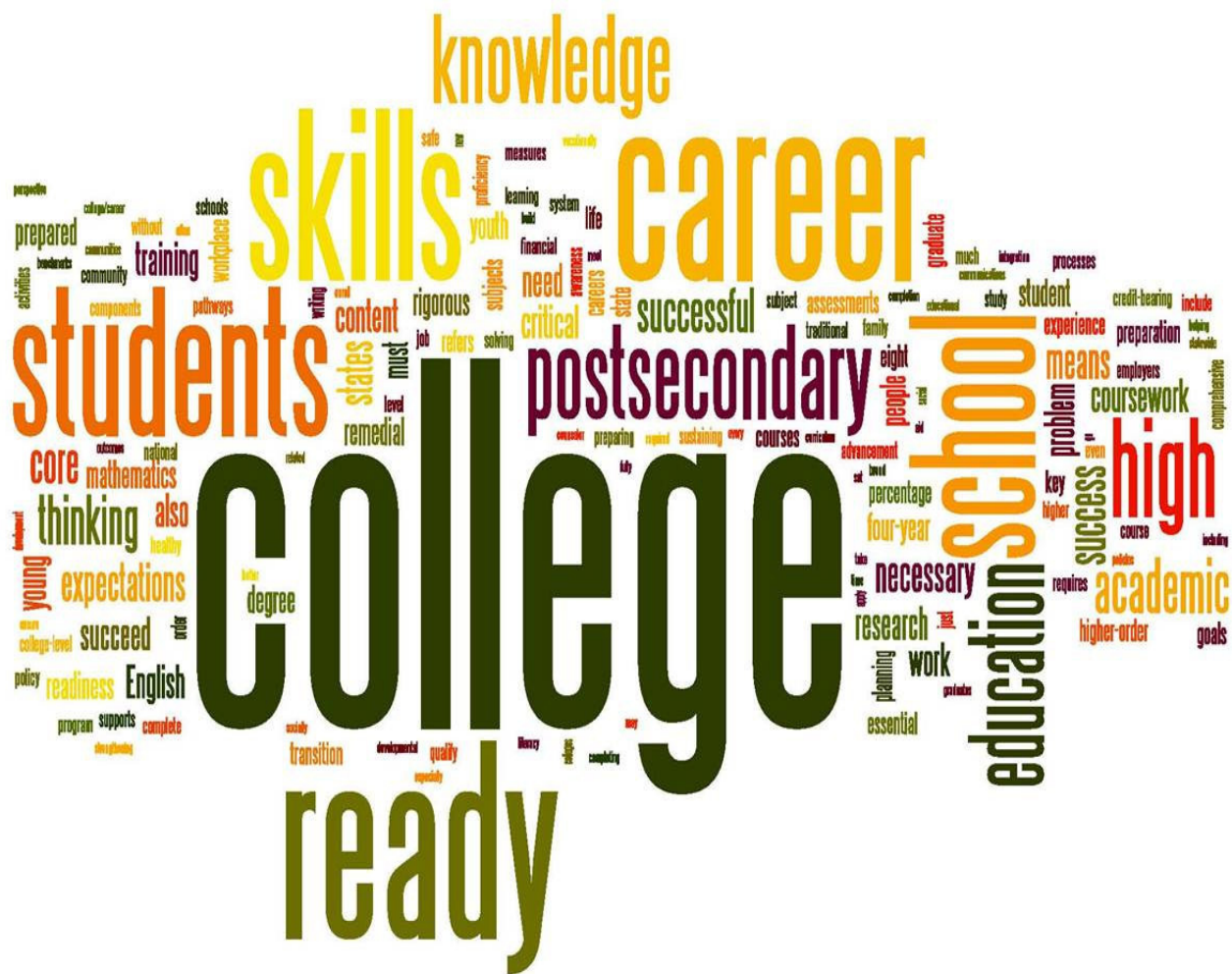


The Virgin Islands Consortium

Editorial: A Look At The Arguments Raised About The New Standardized Tests

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Like many states across the nation, spring 2015 marked the beginning of the administration of new end-of-year tests aligned to the new College and Career Readiness Standards that have been implemented in public schools across the territory. The new tests, Smarter Balanced, are remarkably different from the paper and pencil multiple choice exams students had been given in the past. They ask students to demonstrate and apply their knowledge and skills in an online platform.

While most can agree that the Smarter Balanced tests offer many improvements over previous years' assessments, Smarter Balanced, along with the Standards, have been at the center of much discussion and debate. Some educators, parents, and members of

the community have raised concerns about the loss in instructional time and how the test results will be used.

Argument: Lower test scores is proof that the tests and Standards are not suited for our students. Consider this: It is important to remember that the new Smarter Balanced tests should not be compared to other standardized tests students have taken in the past. Smarter Balanced falls under a completely different system that students had not been exposed to before. Life today is more complex than when many of us were children. There is a global increase in demand for a highly trained workforce with skills such as critical thinking, communication, collaboration, and creativity. Therefore, the Virgin Islands public education system has raised the bar for our students by adopting the new College and Career Readiness Standards because students need to be prepared for what's ahead. The Smarter Balanced tests are a reflection of these Standards and provide a much better measure of the literacy and math skills our students need for postsecondary success. Of course, there is a learning curve for anything that is newly implemented and student scores for the first year of testing should not be viewed negatively. Rather, the scores should be seen as a true starting point for students' readiness for 21st century success. Lower proficiency rates do not mean schools are doing worse or that students are learning less. It simply means that the tests have changed and the bar has been raised.

Argument: Testing is unpleasant for students and results in a loss of instructional time. Consider this: There is always some discomfort with evaluation. However, as we know, testing is a part of life and demonstrating mastery is required before moving on to the next level. From driving tests to certification exams for employment, there will be moments when we have to prove ourselves. The Smarter Balanced assessments are an essential component in raising student achievement levels because the tests provide educators and parents with a clear picture of where students are and what they need in order to continue to progress. The new Standards and tests will be challenging at first, but as teachers improve the rigor of instruction students will rise to the high expectations that have now been set for them.

Submitted by:

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