

# Ilwaco students 1st in US to try new online national tests

## Tablets will be used to conduct Common Core assessments

By **KATIE WILSON**  
EO Media Group

ILWACO, Wash. — Jessie Huntley sat down to take a test recently — not unusual in the life of an eighth-grader.

But she'd never taken a test with quite so many adults hovering around her as she set up her tablet and attached its keyboard. In the room with her were teachers, the district's technology director and employees from the technology company Amplify, which sold more than 200 tablets to the Ocean Beach School District last year.

"Poor kid," said her mom Amy Huntley, a teacher at Ilwaco high school and the district assessment coordinator tasked with overseeing state testing.

But Jessie was an important guinea pig that day. Amplify's secure testing browser had just been approved by the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium. Students at Ilwaco Middle School will be the first in the nation to take the new state-required Smarter Balanced Assessments on Amplify tablets in May.

So when Amplify's engineers wanted to see what happened when a real student took a real test on a real tablet, Jessie and a handful of other students obliged. They took practice tests and reported back on the experience while engineers experimented with what would happen if something went wrong — if, for instance, keyboards were disconnected mid-test.



Photo courtesy of Amy Huntley  
**Eighth-grader Jessie Huntley gets plenty of attention as she helps with a trial of new computer tablet testing procedures and technology at Ilwaco Middle School. Karen Veeland looks on.**

For students like Jessie, taking tests on their tablets will not be a big deal. After all, they've been using their tablets in class all school year, but students new to the Middle School or new to tablets could have some catching up to do.

### Head start for OP

Meanwhile, students coming to the Middle School from Ocean Park Elementary will have had more experience with Smarter Balanced Assessments than students coming from Long Beach Elementary.

Last school year, OPE did a pilot program of the Smarter Balanced Assessments to prepare students well ahead of time

for what's to come. Long Beach Elementary chose not to, hoping to track improvement over previous years under the current state tests. Students and teachers have been working on sample Smarter Balanced questions and test this year, however, LBE Principal Todd Carper said.

Smarter Balanced Assessments tests grades 3-8 and high school students on mathematics and English languages arts/literacy. They are different than traditional tests, in some instances, demanding more of a student than before. Questions may have multiple parts and, in math, stu-

dents may need to spend more time memorizing formulas prior to the test. Ocean Beach School District board members and administrators tried their hand at some sample questions last year and, after struggling over the answers together in groups, wondered out loud how students would do.

### Managing expectations

Across Washington, students will likely do worse than before, the Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction has said.

"Because the new content standards set higher expecta-

tions for students and the new tests are designed to assess student performance against those higher standards, the bar has been raised," said Smarter Balanced Executive Director Joe Willhoft in a statement in November 2014.

The consortium estimates close to two-thirds of students will not meet state standards. "It's not surprising that fewer students could score at Level 3 or higher," Willhoft said. "However, over time the performance of students will improve."

"The reality is, they're not slated to do well," Amy Huntley said. "... We knew that going into this."

Once Smarter Balanced assessment scores go into effect following this year's round of tests, the district will really only have the rest of the state of Washington to compare itself to. In the district alone, "We have nothing to compare this to," Huntley said.

### Minor fixes

But as far as the tablets go, Huntley and Thompson are confident they are setting the students up to succeed. Amplify had to only work on some small issues with how the keyboards connected to the tablets. The school will have to adjust how students sign in to make sure they're connecting to the correct wireless network.

Their biggest concerns have little to do with the mechanics of the tablets themselves and more to do with human actions, Hunt-

ley said: "The kids have to have their tablets at school and fully charged."

Eighth-grader Reese Tynkila, who did a practice math assessment on the tablets along with Jessie Huntley, said many of his peers forget to charge their tablets before school, and in a recent class, several kids had forgotten to bring their tablets altogether.

The school will have extra tablets on hand, already loaded with generic profiles on test days.

But with the devices approved for testing, Thompson will spend less time rushing around the district setting up and taking down computers for tests, shunting them from class to class and taking them out of circulation for regular classroom work. When the district bought the tablets last year, it nearly doubled the number of devices available districtwide.

Many of the middle school students who did practice tests on the tablets for the Amplify visitors said they are glad they will be using familiar devices.

Tynkila said that using his tablet to take a test makes the test more a part of the regular flow of his day. He doesn't have to go into a big testing room full of strange computers. But others are not convinced.

Seventh-grader Michael Knudson said on the practice math test he couldn't zoom in to examine a graph.

"I don't know," he concluded. "I'm still a bit skeptical about it."

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