Practice Test Clusters

What are English Language Arts and Mathematics clusters?

- Clusters are test items that are designed to assess multiple standards within a specific English Language Arts (ELA) or mathematics context. Cluster items have multiple parts, or interactions, that guide students through a task toward a solution to a complex problem. Each cluster includes a task statement that explains its focus.

How are clusters scored?

- The scoring criteria for each practice cluster are accessed through the score button, which is located in the upper left corner of the screen. When users click the button, a pop-up displays the item's scoring assertions along with each assertion's corresponding academic standard. Scoring assertions describe individual pieces of content or knowledge that the student is expected to have mastered, as well as the action within the item that shows whether the student possesses that knowledge. Students have multiple paths to earning score points in each cluster.
- Partial credit is incorporated into cluster scoring, which may include scoring dependencies that enable more accurate measurements of the evidence a student provides. For example, when solving a mathematics problem, a student who calculates numbers incorrectly receives no credit for the calculation. Yet in a subsequent interaction, the student will receive credit for making a correct inference about that calculation even if the calculation itself was incorrect. In ELA clusters, a student who makes an incorrect inference can still receive partial credit if they logically support that incorrect inference with a relevant detail from the text.

How do clusters differ from stand-alone items?

ELA

- Rather than being a series of unrelated discrete questions, ELA item clusters focus on a particular aspect of a reading passage and scaffold the student toward a conclusion, interpretation, or explanation.
- Clusters may offer multiple paths to a correct answer, allowing students to interpret what they read in different ways as long as they can support their interpretation with accurate information from the text.

Mathematics

- Mathematics clusters mirror the problem-solving process, which is rarely limited to one content standard.
- Using rich contexts that are more engaging for students, clusters ask them to complete tasks that represent a typical, real-world problem-solving process and that do not simply assess a specific content skill.
- Clusters provide a platform that allows generation of more scoring assertions per student interaction than typical stand-alone items can produce.