

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

Smarter Balanced Weekly Update

Issue 100

Week ending Friday, February 1, 2013

Top News This Week

- New Director of Professional Learning announced
- Achievement level descriptor review and supporting webinar announced
- Recording of webinar on Pilot Test administration

The Smarter Balanced Weekly Update is an email sent each Friday to keep Consortium members and collaborators informed of new developments and upcoming events. The Update is widely distributed to Consortium state leads, work group members, Consortium and WestEd staff, and Consortium advisors, partners, and service providers. State members should feel free to share information in the Update with those who are interested in the Consortium's work.

Please note that embedded links in the Update sometimes direct readers to the Consortium's internal website. Access to this website is currently limited to Consortium state department of education officials and their delegates. For news and other important information related to Consortium activities, we encourage individuals to visit our public website at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org> and sign up for the monthly newsletter by clicking on the Stay Connected link located at the top of the homepage.

From the Executive Director

Greetings. We've been getting questions from schools and districts in our member states about how 6,000 schools selected to participate in our upcoming Pilot Test were chosen to be part of the scientific sample for Pilot Tests.

Understanding how schools were identified starts with knowing the purposes of the Pilot Test. The Pilot Test is our first chance to evaluate how the items we are developing are working—are they free from bias; are they stable measures of our intended academic content areas; do they assess growth across grades as intended; if we have more than one approach on how we present items/tasks, which one is better; etc. Conducting the analysis necessary to answer these important questions requires us to have the students who participate in the sample accurately reflect the characteristics of students from across the entire Consortium. For example, it would not be a good idea for the schools in the Pilot Test to all be suburban schools. Clearly, if we did that, we would not be able to generalize our findings to schools across the districts. So we created a “scientific sample” of schools to represent the entire Consortium. We also invited all schools in the Consortium to indicate if they wanted to participate in the Pilot Testing. Schools with interest in being in the Pilot Test who are not in the scientific sample are in what is called the “voluntary sample,” and will be able to participate near the end of the Pilot Testing window.

Schools were selected to be part of the “scientific sample” using a pre-determined set of characteristics (e.g., percent free/reduced-price lunch, percent white/non-white students) designed to match the distribution of those characteristics across the Consortium.

The number of items and tasks we are evaluating requires us to sample 10% of the students in the Consortium, and resulted in about 6,000 schools that were identified as being in the scientific sample. These identified schools have been notified either by phone or email. When we find a school that cannot participate, we turn to a second list of schools to find a “matching” school that has characteristics similar to the school that has refused. We give priority to inviting a matching school that has already indicated it wants to be in the “voluntary” sample of schools. Keep in mind, however, that matching the characteristics of the refusal school is the first criterion.

To date, many of our schools in the scientific sample remain unresponsive about their participation. We have asked our state Chiefs and K-12 state leads to ask their respective schools to confirm their participation. The success of our Smarter Balanced Pilot Test is based on strong state and district participation of our scientific sample. Without adequate school participation, Smarter Balanced will not be

able to calibrate the number of items needed for the Field Test next spring. This will dramatically hinder our ability to produce a fully adaptive test.

To this end we have extended our recruiting window for the scientific sample until mid-February to allow our non-responsive schools to confirm their participation. If your school is among this group I encourage you to confirm participation. Schools wanting to participate in the voluntary Pilot should know this deadline has also been extended to mid-February 2013.

The section below goes into more detail about the sampling, if you are interested.

The sample was drawn from all eligible schools/districts selected to be representative of all Smarter Balanced states. A multiple-stage, stratified sampling with nested cluster sampling was used as the primary approach to ensure the representativeness of the selected sample. Stratified sampling entails assignment of schools to strata that have similar characteristics. Schools are then sampled from the stratification cells in proportion to their size.

The states that make up the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium were used to conduct the first-stage stratification to ensure that each state is adequately represented in the sample. Target sample size from each state was determined so that state representation was proportional to state school enrollment population. Within each state, additional strata were defined to increase sampling efficiency. For grades 3 to 9 sample selection, percent proficient on state assessment was used as a stratification variable. And for grades 9 to 11 sample selection, percent Title I was used as a stratification variable. As the next step, random samples of schools were selected as clusters within each stratum. Schools not selected to participate as part of the scientific sample were able to volunteer to participate through an online survey.

I hope this helps explain how the selections of schools came about. We are looking forward to a very successful Pilot Test, and to learning a lot more about our items, our item types, and about the kinds of technology supports and challenges that our analyses illuminate. Thanks in advance to all those schools who have agreed to participate. JW

Announcements

New Director of Professional Learning announced—Effective February 4, Chrystyna V. Mursky, PhD, will join the Consortium as Director of Professional Learning. Chrys brings over 30 years of education experience, having taught or served as an administrator at every level from K-12 to higher education, and most recently served as the statewide program director for the Wisconsin Department of Public Instruction, where she oversaw reforms designed to improve equity and student performance. Chrys will oversee the development of formative assessment strategies and professional learning opportunities for teachers, a key component of the Smarter Balanced Assessment System. She can be reached at chrys.mursky@smarterbalanced.org.

ALD review and webinar—The development of the Consortium's initial achievement level descriptors (ALDs) continues to move forward. The ALDs have now been revised based on feedback received during the public review period which ended January 15, and will be re-posted on Monday, February 4. K-12 and Higher Education State Leads should expect an announcement email next week from sbac@wested.org with details for the round of internal Consortium review to be conducted between February 4–20. A webinar highlighting the revisions will be offered for K-12 and Higher Education State Leads on February 6. Webinar details were provided in the January 23 email sent from sbac@wested.org and will also be included in next week's announcement email.

Recording of webinar on Pilot Test administration—K-12 state leads: A recording of the January 30 webinar, which provided a high-level overview of the Pilot and reviewed steps needed to prepare to administer the test, will be posted at the "Pilot Communications for State Leads" tab of the Collaboration Site mid- to late next week.

Collaboration Conference registration open—Smarter Balanced is pleased to announce that registration is now available for the upcoming Collaboration Conference and Chiefs meeting, March 19–22, 2013, in Arlington, VA (near Reagan National Airport). Invited participants have received an email invitation from

sbac@wested.org with instructions on registration for the conference. Events during this collaboration meeting are role-specific, so please be certain of the session days you are signing up to attend. Please refer to the email invitation sent from sbac@wested.org on January 25. Once you have reviewed the invitation, if you have any questions regarding your attendance on a particular day, please check with the Project Management Partner (WestEd) at sbac@wested.org.

Pilot Test page for state leads launched on Collaboration Site—The internal Collaboration Site has been expanded to contain a Pilot Test page for state leads. The page provides a repository of announcements, presentations, emails, and other relevant Pilot Test documents that have been previously distributed, so that state leads can rapidly retrieve needed information. The page can be accessed at the “Pilot Communications for State Leads” tab on the Collaboration Site home page. Access is limited to authorized users.

Upcoming Events

Webinars for state policy makers—Chiefs and state leads: The National Governors Association (NGA) and the National Conference of State Legislators (NCSL) are separately hosting two webinars that we want you to be aware of: the NGA webinar is on Thursday, February 14, from 10:00 to 11:00 a.m. Pacific, with a primary audience of governors’ education policy advisors; and the NCSL webinar is on Tuesday, February 26, 2013, from 1:00 to 2:00 p.m. Pacific with a primary audience of state legislators and legislative staff. Please see the January 28 email sent from sbac@wested.org for more details.

Resources

Contacting Smarter Balanced—The Smarter Balanced external website (www.smarterbalanced.org) showcases the innovative work of the Consortium and provides frequent updates on activities, milestones, and events. Visitors can submit questions or reach Smarter Balanced staff at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/contact-us/>. Consortium members may contact sbac@wested.org for information on upcoming meetings and events.

Collaboration Site—Consortium members: The Consortium uses an internal collaboration site hosted by Google Apps to enable information sharing and collaboration among the member states. If you are a state employee in a Consortium state and need access to material on this website, please contact sbac@wested.org.

Follow Smarter Balanced on Twitter—Follow @SmarterBalanced for resources and links to the latest news about the Consortium.

Prior versions of the Weekly Update—State members: Previous Smarter Balanced Weekly Updates are available on the internal Smarter Balanced website at <https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/communications/weekly-update-archive>.

Smarter Balanced meeting minutes—State members: Agendas and minutes from previously held meetings are available on the internal Smarter Balanced website at <https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/meetings>.

Answering Open Questions

Each week we will address a question or two on the minds of Consortium members. Send your questions to sbac@wested.org.

What are achievement level descriptors (ALDs)?

Achievement level descriptors (ALDs) are text statements that articulate the knowledge, skills, and abilities represented at different categories of performance on Smarter Balanced assessments. Including the college and career ready category for the high school assessment, they describe how students are progressing toward mastery of the Common Core State Standards and provide clear explanations of student performance for policymakers, educators, and parents. Smarter Balanced has developed an inclusive, collaborative process for drafting initial ALDs in collaboration with K-12 teachers and higher

education faculty nominated by member states, as well as content experts. Draft ALDs will be available for feedback during a four-month comment period later this year. Preliminary ALDs are expected to be finalized by March 2013 by Governing States.

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Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

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