

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

Smarter Balanced Weekly Update

Issue 60

Week ending Friday, April 13, 2012

Top News This Week

- RFP-19 for Test Administration posted
- RFP-22 for Sustainability Task Force consultant posted
- New email addresses for Smarter Balanced executive staff

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, available only to Consortium members. If you are a state employee in a Consortium state and need access to material on this website, please contact sbac@wested.org.

From the Executive Director

Greetings. This week marks the start of the joint meetings of the American Educational Research Association (AERA) and the National Council on Measurement in Education (NCME) in Vancouver, British Columbia—the largest annual gathering of education researchers. The agenda is packed with sessions relevant to our work, and I will participate in a symposium on implementation of the Common Core and next generation assessments. Joseph Martineau from Michigan, an NCME director, is presenting as part of a symposium on evaluating approaches to link scores from different assessments.

In addition, Marty McCall will participate in several sessions, including:

- CAT and Multi-Stage Testing: Lessons From Practice, session chair
- Cognitive Diagnostic Assessment: Lessons From Practice, presenter
- Issues in Computerized Adaptive, Computer-Based, and Tailored Testing, participant

A new study on the accuracy of automated scoring technology will be released in conjunction with the conference. Funded by the Hewlett Foundation, the Automated Student Assessment Prize (ASAP) challenged nine commercial providers of automated essay scoring to approximate the scores of more than 16,000 hand-graded essays from six states. The study found that the software programs achieved virtually identical levels of accuracy as the human graders.

An additional competition, with \$100,000 in prizes, is open to anyone to develop new automated essay-scoring techniques. The open competition is underway now and scheduled to close on April 30th.

Additional information and a link to the research study are available at

<http://gettingsmart.com/news/automated-essay-scoring-systems-demonstrate-effectiveness/>.

The results of the competition are promising because they indicate that it may be possible to create assessments with a greater emphasis on writing in a cost-effective manner. Smarter Balanced intends to make use of automated scoring technologies to the extent practicable for constructed-response items and parts of performance tasks (with back-reading and validation of a sample of items and tasks by teachers).

Our hope has always been that automated scoring software would progress to a point where it could be employed to accurately score writing—and that the development of the assessment system would help to push the technology forward. We will continue to monitor the results of the competition and advances in the field as the development of the assessment system continues. JW

Announcements

The RFP for Test Administration (RFP-19) has been released to vendors—Proposals are due May 16, 2012 to recruit participants for the pilot test and field test, develop test administrator and test coordinator manuals, produce online training modules to prepare states, districts, and schools to administer the pilot test and field test, provide help desk services, and update administration materials and training for operational testing. The RFP is available at <http://www.k12.wa.us/SMARTER/Jobs-Contracts.aspx>.

The RFP for a Sustainability Task Force consultant (RFP-22) has been released to vendors—Smarter Balanced has released to vendors the Sustainability Task Force RFP for a consultant to provide post-grant options on how states will procure, administer, and maintain the assessment system after the federal grant ends. Proposals are due Thursday, May 17. The RFP is available at <http://www.k12.wa.us/SMARTER/Jobs-Contracts.aspx>.

New email addresses—Smarter Balanced has transitioned to a uniform email address format under the smarterbalanced.org domain. Email sent to the @k12.wa.us or @ccsso.org accounts will be forwarded, but please update your contacts and address books for the following Consortium staff:

- Joe Willhoft (Joe.Willhoft@smarterbalanced.org)
- Tony Alpert (Tony.Alpert@smarterbalanced.org)
- Marty McCall (Marty.McCall@smarterbalanced.org)
- Jaci King (Jacqueline.King@smarterbalanced.org)
- Eddie Arnold (Eddie.Arnold@smarterbalanced.org)

Item authoring/item pool application contract awarded—The Consortium has awarded Pacific Metrics the contract for RFP-07 Item Authoring and Item Pool Application. Pacific Metrics will work with the Technology Approach Work Group to develop the item authoring/item pool application.

Updated IT Systems Architecture available—The first update to the IT Systems Architecture materials is posted on the Consortium's public website. Developed in collaboration with the Architecture Review Board, the updated report includes diagram updates, name changes, and requirements clarifications (detailed changes can be found in the release notes). The Smarter Balanced IT Systems Architecture will be updated periodically throughout the development of the assessment system. Revised documents will be available online as PDFs at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/technology>.

Technology Readiness Data Collection—Consistent with our previous message, Smarter Balanced encourages states to consider a phased rollout of the Technology Readiness Tool. Although not required, the following timeline for rollout may be helpful:

1. **April 3–9, Enhance Communications:** Consider issues and challenges, solidify the state-specific FAQs, and help enhance Consortium FAQs.
2. **April 9–June 14, Begin Statewide Data Collection:** Use both the lessons learned from the early implementers and the enhanced FAQs to support a statewide rollout (i.e., including all districts).

Technology Readiness Reporting—Also consistent with our previous message, the reporting system for the Technology Readiness Tool will include reports starting April 9 at 2:00 p.m. Pacific/5:00 p.m. eastern. As reported previously, the timeline is as follows:

1. **April 9–June 14:** Data collection summaries will be available. These reports will describe back to the district and school what was submitted to help improve data quality and to inform the two consortia regarding which types of hardware and operating systems are currently being used in schools.
2. **As Soon As Possible:** Gap analysis reports will be available once we can ensure that minimum requirements are accurate and practicable.

Pearson has distributed information to state readiness coordinators regarding these reports, and the training materials will be updated on Monday to provide additional information to districts as well.

Resources

External website—The Smarter Balanced external website can be found at www.smarterbalanced.org. The site showcases the innovative work of the Consortium and provides frequent updates on activities, milestones, and events. Visitors are able to explore an interactive timeline of activities by school year, download new fact sheets and resources, and sign up for a monthly e-newsletter.

Collaboration Site—Consortium members: The Consortium uses an internal collaboration site hosted by Google Docs 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.

Relevant news items—State members: Weekly selections of news items relevant to the Consortium are available on the internal Smarter Balanced website at <https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/communications/news-archive>.

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.

How is Smarter Balanced defining college and career readiness?

Smarter Balanced is developing assessments aligned to the full depth and breadth of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Through its member states, and in consultation with the lead standards writers and other national education experts, Smarter Balanced is translating the CCSS into assessment targets, test blueprints, and, ultimately, assessment items and performance tasks. The Consortium also will establish performance benchmarks that define the level of content and skill mastery that marks students as college- and career-ready. These performance benchmarks will be determined through a deliberative and evidence-based standard-setting process, which will include input from K-12 educators and college and university faculty. Setting performance standards will not occur until 2014 after student data have been collected through pilot and field testing. The Consortium has begun the process of translating the standards into assessments, releasing content specifications in ELA/literacy and mathematics and approving the core “claims” about student knowledge and skills that the assessments will seek to measure. Item specifications also have been developed and released for comment.

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Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

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