SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium
SBAC Weekly Update
Issue 41
Week ending Friday, November 11, 2011

Top News This Week
•   Second round of the IT Systems Architecture Showcase to be held on November 21
•   TAC meeting to be held December 14–15
•   ESEA Flexibility Waiver Request support available
•   SMARTER Balanced is now on Twitter

The SBAC 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 these websites, please contact sbac@wested.org. For the next month, links are included to both the new Collaboration Site and the prior internal website. Starting in December 2011, the prior internal website will be retired.

From the Executive Director
Greetings. This week I want to share an update on the development of our content specifications. We began this process in the spring with a close review of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts/literacy and math. It quickly became clear that the CCSS were created to guide curriculum development and instruction, not to be a summative assessment blueprint.

Test developers need to follow highly specific information about what each item or task should include at a level of detail well beyond what is provided by a typical standards document. The Consortium's content specifications will provide guidance to test developers that clarifies how the intended learning expressed in the CCSS can be most effectively and efficiently evaluated in the context of large-scale assessments. To do this, the way the standards (and statements within standards) are stated need to be reorganized, combined or further interpreted into groupings that represent similar kinds of assessment items and tasks. It is important to note that even though this process produces an assessment-based reorganization of the CCSS, the content of the standards themselves is not changed.

Throughout the summer, Dr. Linda Darling-Hammond, the Consortium's Senior Research Advisor and professor of education at the Stanford University School of Education, led the development of the content specifications in collaboration with experts in the field. The SMARTER Balanced Technical Advisory Committee, Consortium work groups, and the lead authors of the Common Core State Standards also contributed to the documents.

The content specifications focus on what should be evaluated at each grade level and how it can best be represented in items and tasks; how specific content and skills can be combined to enable assessment to be efficient; and how reporting categories reflecting high-priority elements of the standards can be supported with sufficient opportunities for assessment. The resulting assessment claims and assessment targets represent the ways in which students may be expected to demonstrate their knowledge, often by integrating skills and concepts across strands, rather than tapping only isolated skills within one strand.

In August and September, we released draft documents for review by member states and partners. An additional round of review of the math content specifications will occur later this month. On Tuesday, November 22, we will review the claims in ELA/literacy with our member states. Governing States will

then have an opportunity to vote on adopting the claims (with math following in December), and we expect final documents will be available shortly thereafter.

Why are we focusing on the claims for approval? Claims are the broad statements of the assessment system's learning outcomes; they represent a summation of what students must demonstrate in each content domain and establish at a minimum the Consortium-endorsed score reporting categories. The rest of the documents—including assessment targets that will be used to translate the grade-level Common Core standards into content frameworks along a learning continuum—will be used by our work groups and contractors as guidance for test design and item and task development, but do not represent policy decisions for the Consortium.

We expect to continue to refine the ELA/literacy and math content specifications in the coming months as the test blueprints are developed and item/task specifications are established. While the content specifications are living documents that will inform the development of the SMARTER Balanced assessment system during the coming year, we look forward to a robust discussion later this month to make sure the claims embedded in the content specifications meet the needs of our member states.   JW

Announcements
Second round IT Systems Architecture Workshop Showcase—Consortium members will have an opportunity to review the revisions and enhancements to the Systems Architecture Workshop deliverables via a webinar-based showcase on Monday, November 21, from 12 p.m. to 1 p.m. (Pacific). The purpose of this meeting is to review the feedback from the October 28 and October 31 webinars and walk-through the updated Architecture Documentation in a number of key areas. Please see separate email for agenda and webinar details.

TAC meeting—The third meeting of the SMARTER Balanced Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) will occur on December 14–15, 2011, in San Francisco. As in the past, our member states are welcome to participate in person or virtually via live webinar. Those states wishing to participate in person may send one representative and will be required to use its own funds for transportation, lodging, per diem, and other expenses. If your state is planning to participate in person, please email sbac@wested.org by the close of business on Tuesday, December 6, so we can confirm that the meeting space will accommodate all participants.

ESEA Flexibility Waiver support—State Chiefs and State Leads: A document designed to support SMARTER Consortium states applying for ESEA Flexibility is now available. The document is specifically designed to support a state's answer to question 1.C "Develop and Administer Annual, Statewide, Aligned, High-Quality Assessments That Measure Student Growth" and could be included in its entirety as a complete document or a state could use portions of the document for their application. Please note that the third paragraph of the document must be updated with specific state information, including the state's role in the Consortium. The document is available on the internal SMARTER Balanced websites at https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/document-library and http://smarter.k12partners.org/content/document-library. If you require a copy of your state's signed Memorandum of Understanding, an electronic scan can be sent via email to the SBAC state lead within 24 hours of receiving the request.

SMARTER Balanced is now on Twitter—Follow @SmarterBalanced to get resources and links to the latest news about the Consortium.

Upcoming Events
All States meeting—Governing State and Advisory State leads: The next All States meeting will occur on Tuesday, November 22, at 10 a.m. (Pacific). Please see separate email for agenda and webinar information.

Resources
Collaboration Site launch—Consortium members: The new internal Collaboration Site has been fully launched. The new website replaces the current internal website and features extended capabilities, such

as calendar sharing and document collaboration. The existing internal website will continue to be supported for the next month to allow adequate time for all members to transition to the new Collaboration Site. You should have already received access information that includes your username and password. If you have not received your login details or are having trouble logging into the site, 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 websites at https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/communications/news-archive and http://smarter.k12partners.org/content/news-archive.

Prior versions of the Weekly Update—State members: Previous SBAC Weekly Updates are available on the internal SMARTER Balanced websites at https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/communications/weekly-update-archive and http://smarter.k12partners.org/content/sbac-weekly-update-archive.

SMARTER Balanced meeting minutes—State members: Agendas and minutes from previously held meetings are available on the internal SMARTER Balanced websites at https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/meetings and http://smarter.k12partners.org/content/agendas-and-minutes.

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 long will it take a student to complete the summative assessment?

The end-of-year summative assessment that is used for accountability purposes consists of two parts: 1) a computer adaptive portion and 2) performance tasks in reading, writing, and math. We expect that the computer adaptive test event will be similar in length or shorter than summative tests today—about an hour for each content area. The exact test length will be determined by member states, educators, and technical advisors over the next year. One of the advantages of computer adaptive testing is that it is more efficient than fixed-form testing, requiring fewer questions to accurately determine each student's achievement level.

The performance tasks are delivered by computer, but are not computer-adaptive. At this point, we are designing one performance task for reading, one for writing, and two for math at each grade 3–11, including grades 9 and 10. Performance tasks provide an opportunity to challenge students to apply their knowledge and skills to respond to complex, real-world problems. They can best be described as collections of questions and tasks presented to students that are coherently connected to a single theme or scenario. For example, a student may be presented with reading material on a given topic, and asked questions about the reading. That may be followed by reading on the same topic, but from a different perspective, with questions on that reading, plus some compare/contrast questions. Finally, the student may be provided additional readings on the same, or an associated topic, and asked to take a position or provide an argument in favor of or opposing a particular perspective, using the provided texts as reference. This example performance task could take place across more than one sitting of 45–60 minutes each.

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