SMARTER Balanced Assessment Consortium SBAC Weekly Update

Issue 45

Week ending Friday, December 16, 2011

Top News This Week

- Work Group/Contractor Collaboration Conference scheduled for February 9–11 in San Antonio
- RFP posted for Pilot Item/Task Writing and Review
- RFP posted for Item Authoring and Item Pool application
- Revised Mathematics Content Specifications available for review through January 3

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. As we approach the end of 2011, it's a good time to take stock of our progress. We spent a significant chunk of time this year creating a detailed and realistic plan for the work ahead. In June, the Consortium released a Master Work Plan, followed in September by the release of our procurement schedule that defines the activities and timeline for the development of the summative assessment. These documents are available on the Consortium's website: http://www.smarterbalanced.org/Resources.aspx.

Since the vast majority of the Consortium's work will be completed under contract with vendors, developing effective solicitations in a timely manner is critical. I am pleased to report that to date we have finalized and released nine of the 19 contract solicitations outlined in the Master Work (documents related to each RFP and its current status can be found at: http://www.smarterbalanced.org/Jobs-Contracts.aspx), including:

- RFP-02 IT Readiness—Development of the IT readiness tool—in collaboration with PARCC—will begin in early 2012. The tool is intended to support states and local education agencies as they evaluate existing technology and infrastructure and plan for the transition to online assessments.
- RFP-03 IT Systems Architecture—The first phase of the IT systems architecture work concluded this week with an overview of the final version of the architecture design deliverables and materials. To guide this work and ensure continuity of architecture standards through 2014, a state-led Architecture Review Board will convene in early 2012.
- RFP-04 Item Specifications—Work has already begun on this contract with a survey of member states' accessibility and accommodations policies. In addition, the contractor will provide specifications for item types and performance tasks, a style guide for all materials, and bias and sensitivity guidelines to support the assessment system.
- **RFP-05 Psychometric Services**—The evaluation process is underway for this contract, which will provide technical services and analysis to support psychometric needs such as: the pilot and field tests, scale development, and implementation of a validity framework.
- RFP-06 Accessibility and Accommodations Policy Guidelines—Creating assessment participation policies for English language learners and students with disabilities—as well as

strategies for technology-enhanced approaches to accommodations—will ensure that the assessment system accurately measures achievement and growth for special student populations. The contract is in negotiation and a successful bidder will be announced soon.

- RFP-07 Item Authoring/Item Pool—This contract will help the Consortium acquire an application that can support item authoring and development activities, as well as store and retrieve the pool of items available for use by the summative and interim assessment system. The solicitation is open through January 18, 2012.
- RFP-08 Item/Task Materials Development—Training materials and policies to guide the writing and review of items and tasks for content, accessibility, and bias/sensitivity will be developed under this contract. Bids have been received, and the evaluation process is underway.
- RFP-09 Test and CAT Specifications—This contract will develop test specifications, test blueprints, CAT specifications, and preliminary CAT simulation studies. The solicitation period closed in late November, and bids are currently being evaluated.
- RFP-14 Item/Task Writing/Review—Pilot—Item/task development will be a major activity in 2012, and this contract will proceed in several stages: develop and research (through small-scale trials and cognitive labs) a small number of items and tasks, including innovative items; review state-submitted items for inclusion in the Consortium item bank; and develop a sufficient number of new items and tasks to support pilot testing of the summative assessment in 2013. Just released, this solicitation is open through January 18, 2012. A separate contract will support item development for the field test.

Several additional contract solicitations—including test engine development, initial achievement level descriptors, translations, and report development—are currently being developed and reviewed, and will be released as RFPs in early January. Thanks to the commitment and dedication of our work groups and Governing States, we will begin 2012 with a significant portion of development activities underway.

This will be the last Weekly Update for 2011. Happy holidays and best wishes for the New Year! JW

Announcements

Revised Mathematics Content Specifications available for review—The revised Content Specifications for mathematics are available for a second round of review. Feedback is due by 11:59 p.m. Pacific time on Tuesday, January 3. Instructions on how to provide feedback through an online survey are included with the materials posted at http://www.smarterbalanced.org/Resources.aspx.

Technical Advisory Committee—The third meeting of the Consortium's Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) took place this week. Discussions included issues related to the validity framework for the assessment system, the alignment of Content Specifications to the Common Core, approaches to scaling, and the plan for the development of items and tasks for the pilot test.

The RFP for the Pilot Item/Task Development (RFP-14) was released to vendors December 13— Proposals are due Wednesday, January 18. The Consortium is seeking implementation and oversight of several components of pilot activities: research to inform pilot item/task development processes; pilot item/task development; and content, accessibility, and bias and sensitivity reviews of items/tasks. The RFP is available at http://www.smarterbalanced.org/Jobs-Contracts.aspx.

ELL Advisory Committee—Chiefs and State Leads: The Governing States have approved the initial 10 members of the SMARTER Balanced English Language Learners Advisory Committee and are requesting nominations from member states for two additional members with expertise in American Sign Language (ASL) and indigenous and low-frequency languages. State leads should refer to the email distributed on December 13 for instructions on submitting nominations, which are due by December 23, 2011.

Sustainability Task Force—Chiefs and State Leads: The SMARTER Balanced Sustainability Task Force met on Friday, December 16. The task force is focused on developing a series of recommendations regarding how states will procure, administer, and maintain the SBAC system after the federal grant ends

in October 2014. The task force's recommendations will guide future SBAC governance as well as provide states with a budget and procurement roadmap to prepare for the 2014 administration of the SBAC system.

The RFP for the Item Authoring and Item Pool (RFP 07) application was released to vendors on December 9—Proposals are due Wednesday, January 18. The Consortium is seeking to acquire and implement an application that can support item authoring and development activities as well as store and retrieve the pool of items available for use by the summative and interim assessment system. The RFP is available at http://www.smarterbalanced.org/Jobs-Contracts.aspx.

Upcoming Events

Work Group/Contractor Collaboration Conference—A meeting will take place February 9–11 in San Antonio, Texas, in coordination with CCSSO SCASS meetings, to facilitate collaboration between SBAC work groups and recently engaged Consortium contractors. The purpose of this meeting is three-fold: 1) to afford work groups and contractors the opportunity for face-to-face planning; 2) to allow work group leadership to collaborate both within and among work groups; and 3) to convene all state leads and work group co-chairs to discuss design and implementation issues and overall progress of the project. CCSSO will be coordinating travel accommodations and will provide more details in the coming weeks.

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.

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 https://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 SMARTER Balanced state lead within 24 hours of receiving the request.

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 https://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.

Will information collected through the IT readiness tool impact availability of the paper and pencil administration option for the summative assessment?

SMARTER Balanced is committed to working with member states to ensure a successful transition to next-generation assessments. The IT readiness tool is intended to support states and local education agencies as they evaluate existing technology and infrastructure and plan for the transition to online assessments. Development of the tool will begin in early 2012, and additional information about the tool will be available over the next few months while SMARTER Balanced and PARCC collaborate to design the application.

To facilitate the transition to the SMARTER Balanced assessment system, the Consortium will make a paper and pencil version of the summative assessment available for three years. As noted in the Consortium's proposal to the U.S. Department of Education, costs associated with the administration and scoring of the paper and pencil assessment will be borne by states that elect to pursue this option. Since each state has different priorities and needs, states will need to determine whether or not to procure the paper option. In addition, the state would establish the criteria that would be applied to determine whether or not schools qualify for the paper and pencil option. The role the Consortium is to play in reviewing and/or guiding those criteria has not been determined, and is subject to further definition.

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