

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

Smarter Balanced Weekly Update

Issue 59

Week ending Friday, April 6, 2012

Top News This Week

- Item authoring/item pool application contract awarded
- Updated IT Systems Architecture available
- Technology Readiness Data Collection
- Technology Readiness Reporting

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. I had the opportunity this week to participate in a meeting at the University of California, Davis, with John Easton, director of the Institute of Educational Sciences (IES). Easton was in California to meet with faculty and review the school's IES-funded projects. I am grateful to Jamal Abedi, professor of education at UC Davis and a member of the Smarter Balanced Technical Advisory Committee (TAC), for extending the invitation to discuss the Consortium's work.

IES is the research arm of the U.S. Department of Education and includes the National Center for Education Statistics, the National Center for Education Evaluation and Regional Assistance, the National Center for Education Research, and the National Center for Special Education Research. These organizations support evaluation, research, and assessment initiatives that provide relevant information about American education to policymakers.

Our connections with the education research community are critical. Through the Smarter Balanced TAC, advisory committees, member states, and partners, Smarter Balanced draws upon national experts in assessment, technology, and content. Not only do these partnerships provide guidance and insight for our work, they also extend our capacity. Smarter Balanced has an ambitious agenda paired with clearly defined resources. We cannot study every issue related to our work without impacting our ability to deliver an assessment system by the 2014-15 school year.

As an example, Smarter Balanced Senior Research Advisor Linda Darling-Hammond convened a meeting of policy experts this week in Washington, DC, as part of a project funded by the Hewlett Foundation to investigate the true cost of next generation assessments (Jeff Nellhaus, director of assessment at PARCC, and I were invited to provide an assessment perspective). This project builds on assessment cost modeling done by Darling-Hammond and her colleagues at the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education. It will be of enormous value in helping to explain the benefits of improved assessment systems.

I look forward to continuing to engage and collaborate with our colleagues in the field to further our work to develop a next generation assessment system. JW

Announcements

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 implementors 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 p.m. Pacific/5 p.m. Eastern. As reported previously, the timeline is as follows:

1. **April 9th–June14:** 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 Coordinators regarding these reports and the training materials will be updated on Monday to provide additional information to districts as well.

Pilot test item research and development contract awarded—The Consortium has awarded CTB/McGraw-Hill the contract for RFP-14 Pilot Item/Task/Stimulus Research, Development, and Reviews. CTB/McGraw-Hill will work with the Item Development and Performance Tasks Work Groups to research and develop items for the pilot test, and will be working in partnership with American Institutes for Research, Data Recognition Corporation, Council for Aid to Education, College Board, and Human Resources Research Organization.

PIO communications update webinar held—This webinar provided an update on communications resources available from the Consortium, including collateral materials, digital tools, and assistance to ensure that stakeholders receive timely, accurate, and compelling information about the new assessments. A summary of the webinar was distributed.

Formative Master Work Plan feedback from states and work groups due April 10—Member states and work groups are requested to provide feedback on the Formative Master Work Plan that will be reviewed, consolidated, and integrated into the Plan. Each member state and each work group is requested to send one (1) response by April 10 to sbac@wested.org, reflecting as comprehensive a view from the state agency—including the Chief State School Officer—or work group, as possible. Please see the email sent from sbac@wested.org on March 27 for instructions for submitting feedback and key questions to guide your responses.

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.

Has Smarter Balanced decided what proportion of time or number of points will be devoted to performance tasks on the summative assessment?

Smarter Balanced is working with member states to ensure that the design of the summative assessment provides adequate information about student achievement and growth in meeting the English language arts/literacy and mathematics claims.

Although it is still too early in the test design process to make definitive statements, it looks like performance tasks could comprise about half of the time students spend taking the summative assessment, since these activities are meant to measure capacities such as depth of understanding, writing and research skills, and complex analysis, which cannot be adequately assessed with selected- or constructed-response items. However, they will likely provide a somewhat smaller proportion of the total points for the summative assessment.

As part of the process to get more specific about test design, we have asked ETS (as part of RFP-09 Test Blueprint and Computer Adaptive Test Specifications) to conduct a preliminary test simulation based on a draft test blueprint developed by Smarter Balanced staff and work groups. This simulation is designed to ensure that the draft test blueprint provides sufficient information about student performance across a wide range of achievement. The draft test blueprint will then be revised by the Item Development, Performance Tasks, and Test Design Work Groups, and presented to Governing States for review.

--

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

WestEd—Project Management Partner

sbac@wested.org