

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

Smarter Balanced Weekly Update

Issue 67

Week ending Friday, June 1, 2012

Top News This Week

- Work group solicitation for open positions
- New positions announced
- Recording of webinar on college placement testing available

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, I would like to discuss our approach to comparability of assessment results with PARCC. At the high school level, it is critical that the proficiency standards for Smarter Balanced and PARCC be aligned so that when students move to a new state or apply to an out-of-state college, they will be held to the same college- and career-ready benchmark.

In addition, parents, teachers, and policymakers want to be able to compare results from the summative assessment in elementary and middle school across states to identify strengths and challenges to improve teaching and learning. That's why Smarter Balanced is working with PARCC to ensure that proficiency standards and data from the respective assessment systems will be comparable and portable across the grades.

To achieve these goals, both consortia are committed to incorporating international benchmarks into the assessments. For example, by linking to the scale developed by the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), the consortia could create a simple method for comparing scores to a well regarded international assessment. Including items developed for the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP) would provide a common benchmark between the two assessment systems. We are also exploring how to align the assessments with the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS).

Another important step is the development of "achievement level descriptors" (ALDs). ALDs are text-based descriptions of what it means to have achieved proficiency—for Smarter Balanced, this means whether students are on-track to be college- and career-ready. Typically, these descriptors include two categories below proficient (e.g., below basic, basic) and two categories describing proficient and above. ALDs must clearly communicate how students are progressing toward mastery of the Common Core State Standards to a range of stakeholders.

Smarter Balanced and PARCC will each develop ALDs. We expect to begin drafting initial ALDs—in collaboration with the Validation and Psychometrics Work Group, curriculum specialists, and higher education representatives—in mid-June, with review by Governing States in September. The initial ALDs will be used during the initial achievement standard setting scheduled for August 2014. The final ALDs will be completed during the final achievement standard setting that will take place after the first year of operational administration in 2015.

Throughout the ALD development process, we will continue to collaborate with PARCC to ensure that our efforts are aligned and support the ultimate goal of comparability. JW

Announcements

Work group solicitation—State leads: Smarter Balanced seeks to fill open positions on the following work groups:

- Accessibility and Accommodations: 2 member positions
- Item Development: 1 member position (seeking expertise in psychometrics)
- Performance Tasks: 1 member position (seeking expertise in mathematics performance tasks)
- Test Administration: 1 member position
- Technology Approach: 1 co-chair position and 1 member position

The work groups support and oversee the development of the Smarter Balanced assessment system. Work groups are a fundamental part of the program's development and implementation approach and leverage the expertise, leadership, and resources within the member states. True to the philosophy driving Smarter Balanced, state education agency (SEA) staff comprise the work groups; participation of all states is essential to the success of our Consortium. Please see the email sent from sbac@wested.org on May 30 for details. Forms are due no later than June 11.

New positions announced—Smarter Balanced is seeking two new staff members, a Chief Technology Officer and a Director of Professional Learning. The Chief Technology Officer (CTO) will ensure that the Smarter Balanced assessment system is supported by a robust technology infrastructure. The CTO will provide expertise in system architecture, application development and deployment, open source software management, interoperability standards, help desk management, technology procurement, and IT strategic planning. The Director of Professional Learning (DPL) will ensure that the Smarter Balanced assessment system is supported by a robust approach to professional learning and formative assessment practices. The DPL will provide expertise in instruction, curriculum development and lesson planning, differentiated instruction, competency-based learning/proficiency-based instruction, and formative assessment practices. The full position descriptions are posted at: <http://www.k12.wa.us/SMARTER/Jobs-Contracts.aspx>.

Recording of webinar on college placement testing available—Cynthia Liston of the North Carolina Community College System and Clive Belfield of the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Teachers College discussed CCRC's recently released research on placement testing. This research provides very helpful information that can inform state's deliberations about the use of tests and other measures in the intake and placement of students. A recording of the May 22 webinar presentation can now be viewed at: <https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/higher-education/higher-education-webinars>.

EC Co-Chair nominations—Nominations are now being accepted for the position of Executive Committee Co-Chair to fill the remainder of the term held by Judy Park. The term of this position runs through September 2012. Nominations close on Wednesday, June 6. Once the slate of nominees is finalized, the Governing State leads will vote to select the new Co-Chair. Please refer to the email sent from sbac@wested.org on May 22 for detailed instructions and forms.

New Smarter Balanced staff announced—Shelbi Cole, PhD, joined the Consortium as the director of mathematics, bringing a wealth of experience in mathematics curriculum and assessment development from her work with the Connecticut State Department of Education. She also served as the co-chair of the Performance Tasks Work Group and was closely involved in the development of the Mathematics Content Specifications. Magda Chia was named director of support for under-represented students. Magda is completing her PhD in education, equity, and cultural diversity at the University of Colorado, Boulder. Her research focuses on validity and fairness in assessments across diverse student populations. She will play a critical role in ensuring the assessment system serves the needs of all students, including students with disabilities and English language learners. Shelbi and Magda can be reached at Shelbi.Cole@smarterbalanced.org and Magda.Chia@smarterbalanced.org.

AI scoring information sought—As part of Contract-14 Pilot Item/Task/Stimulus Research, Development, and Reviews, the Consortium seeks to understand and extend the existing state of the art in automated scoring technologies. The results of this work will be used to develop a vision for automated scoring of student results on future assessments, for validation procedures, and to determine integration with human scoring if necessary.

American Institutes for Research (AIR), which is conducting this research, needs to obtain previously administered test items, associated student responses, and hand-scoring materials in order to conduct initial analyses on automated scoring engines for mathematics and English language arts. On behalf of AIR, Smarter Balanced is seeking test items and associated student responses to extended constructed-response questions and writing prompts that have been administered and hand scored for state assessments. Please refer to the email sent from sbac@wested.org on May 22 for details.

Higher Education ARB members named—The Architecture Review Board (ARB) oversees modifications to the IT Systems Architecture, and makes recommendations regarding technology standards. The ARB comprises state K-12 and higher education representatives, as well as members of the Consortium's Technology Approach Work Group. The following new ARB members were selected as higher education representatives:

- Bonnie Edwards (CA) – Senior Information Systems Analyst, CA Community Colleges Chancellor's Office
- Xiaobing Hou (CT) – Assistant Professor, Central Connecticut State University
- Martin Horejsi (MT) – Associate Professor of Instructional Technology, University of Montana
- Richard Halverson (WI) – Associate Professor, Educational Leadership & Policy Analysis, University of Wisconsin–Madison

For further information regarding the IT Systems Architecture or the ARB, please visit <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/technology/>.

Upcoming Events

TAC meeting—The next meeting of the Smarter Balanced Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) will occur on July 25–26, 2012, in Denver. 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 as soon as possible so we can confirm that the meeting space will accommodate all participants.

Resources

Updated Master Work Plan and procurement schedule (version 4.2)—Updated versions of the Master Work Plan and procurement schedule are now posted on the Smarter Balanced website at the following link: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/about/procurement/>

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 will states that have amended the Common Core State Standards assess students on these additional content standards?

States adopting the Common Core State Standards may choose to amend the standards with up to 15 percent additional content. While the Consortium's primary responsibility is to develop an assessment system aligned with the final version of the standards released in June 2010, the ability to assess these additional standards is an important concern for states. The Smarter Balanced IT Systems Architecture specifies the use of open-source technology and standard protocols whenever possible, with the goal of providing flexibility for states—including the expected ability to incorporate state-developed items that assess these additional content standards into the assessment. As key technology components are developed—including the item bank, test engine, test delivery, and reporting systems—Smarter Balanced will rely on input from member states, work groups, and the Architecture Review Board to ensure that the assessment system meets state needs.

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Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

WestEd—Project Management Partner

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