

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

Smarter Balanced Weekly Update

Issue 86

Week ending Friday, October 12, 2012

Top News This Week

- Public release of sample items and performance tasks
- Webinar on CCSS for ELA/Literacy

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. Access to this website is currently limited to Consortium state department of education officials and their delegates. For news and other important information related to Consortium activities, we encourage individuals to visit our public website at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org> and sign up for the monthly newsletter by clicking on the Stay Connected link located at the top of the homepage.

From the Executive Director

Greetings. As I mentioned last week, October 1 marked the two-year anniversary of the Consortium. We are officially a toddler, and the Consortium has met some important developmental milestones. Smarter Balanced has moved from planning to development of the assessment system—and will soon launch large-scale tryouts and teacher training efforts. At the halfway point of our grant, I want to spend a little time talking about how much we have grown.

- Test design—Governing States will soon be asked to approve the summative assessment design, which encompasses test length, reporting categories, and the test blueprint. (Test design will be the focus of the discussion on the Chiefs call on October 29.) Throughout the summer and fall, educators from Governing States have worked with experts to write and review more than 10,000 items and performance tasks for the Pilot Test in early 2013. Thousands of schools across our member states will be able to pilot the assessments beginning in February 2013. This week, we released sample items and performance tasks, giving stakeholders an advance look at the types of questions students will encounter when the assessments are implemented in the 2014-15 school year.
- Information technology—Smarter Balanced has developed an advanced IT systems architecture to support an open-source assessment system. New hardware purchasing guidelines are available to help states and districts plan for instructional technology purchases. This fall, we will release minimum technology specifications based on the input received from the Technology Readiness Tool.
- Accessibility and accommodations—The Consortium will soon finalize an accessibility and accommodations policy framework. Advisory committees on students with disabilities and English language learners—along with our Accessibility and Accommodations Work Group—oversee the important work of ensuring that the assessment system provides accurate measures of achievement and growth for all students.
- Formative assessment and professional learning—In June, Governing States approved the Formative Assessment Master Work Plan, which maps out the key activities and timing of the formative assessment work ahead, including the creation of a digital library of formative assessment resources. Looking ahead to 2013, we will recruit State Leadership Teams and State Networks of Educators to identify and evaluate formative assessment practices.
- Collaboration—Smarter Balanced has deepened our collaboration with higher education by establishing state Higher Education Leads and adopting a process of higher education input into key policy decisions. We have engaged higher education faculty in item writing and review and

the drafting of achievement level descriptors, to ensure that the 11th grade summative assessment provides evidence that students are college-ready. We're also working closely with the broader education field to discuss our work and gather feedback.

We've come a long way in just two years, and there are lots of ways to measure our progress. Consider that two years ago, we had just one staff member—me. Smarter Balanced now has a full-time staff of eight, supplemented by a strong group of advisors and consultants. Two years ago, we had only one contract, with WestEd for project management services. Today, we have 14 active contracts. I want to thank all of our states and partners for their commitment to this project and to the collaborative, consensus-based process that has served us well.

Finally, I had the opportunity this week to attend a conference sponsored by the Hewlett Foundation and coordinated by the Alliance for Excellent Education. The event brought together about 75 participants from experimental schools, the assessment consortia, and the philanthropic and education communities to discuss deeper learning. Deeper learning describes the delivery of rich core content to students in innovative ways that allow them to learn and then apply what they have learned—exactly what the Common Core State Standards and next-generation assessments aim to do. It was a fascinating discussion, and I invite you to learn more at <http://deeperlearning4all.org/>. JW

Announcements

Public release of sample items and performance tasks—The Smarter Balanced sample items and performance tasks were released on Tuesday, October 9. In less than a week, more than 45,000 people visited the website. Public interest has been high, as indicated by numerous articles, blog posts, and a high volume of social-media activity, including tweets and retweets on Twitter.

The sample assessment items and performance tasks can be viewed on the Smarter Balanced website at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks/>. Help-desk support will be provided through November 2, between the hours of 7:00 a.m. eastern time and 8:00 p.m. eastern time, Monday through Friday.

Supporting communications materials are available on the Collaboration Site at <https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/communications/sample-item-release> to assist state leads in discussing the sample items and performance tasks with stakeholders. These materials include suggested talking points, responses to FAQs, a link to the recorded training webinar with Joe Willhoft, and a Sample Items PowerPoint template presentation.

Webinar on CCSS for ELA/Literacy-- Barb Kapinus of Smarter Balanced and Sue Pimentel and Jennifer Dean of Student Achievement Partners will present an informational webinar about the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) for ELA/Literacy to the Consortium on October 25. The webinar will provide a deeper understanding of the CCSS for ELA/Literacy, with a focus on Smarter Balanced and its development of assessments aligned to the CCSS, and will provide an overview of the CCSS' implications for assessment, including criteria for evaluating CCSS-aligned items and passages. Information on how to join the webinar will be sent out from sbac@wested.org next week.

Sample item release webinars for higher education scheduled for October 16 and 31—Smarter Balanced will host webinars for higher education faculty on the sample mathematics and ELA items on October 16 and 31, respectively. Please refer to the October 9 email sent from sbac@wested.org for more details.

Collaboration Conference feedback requested—A brief survey was sent to attendees of the September Collaboration Conference in St. Louis. Please refer to the October 3 email sent from sbac@wested.org for more details. The survey will close on October 17.

Upcoming Events

Webinar for Educators—The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) will host a webinar by Jason Zimba and Beth Cocuzza of Student Achievement Partners on October 22 at 12:30 p.m. Pacific time. The webinar is specifically for state and district curriculum leaders, education policymakers, and teachers to better understand the K-8 Publishers' Criteria for the Common Core State Standards for Mathematics. Register [here](#).

Resources

Contacting Smarter Balanced—The Smarter Balanced external website (www.smarterbalanced.org) showcases the innovative work of the Consortium and provides frequent updates on activities, milestones, and events. Visitors can submit questions or reach Smarter Balanced staff at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/contact-us/>. Consortium members may contact sbac@wested.org for information on upcoming meetings and events.

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

Follow Smarter Balanced on Twitter—Follow @SmarterBalanced for resources and links to the latest news about the Consortium.

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 long will it take students to complete the Smarter Balanced summative assessment?

The length of the summative assessment has not yet been decided. This fall, Governing States will be asked to review and approve the summative assessment design, which encompasses test length, reporting categories, and the test blueprint.

Test length is influenced by several factors, including the amount of content that the test assesses. The

Common Core ELA/literacy standards cover writing and speaking and listening. This represents a much broader range of content than most statewide reading assessments cover today. Smarter Balanced will assess the depth and breadth of the Common Core to provide a richer picture of student achievement.

In addition, the summative assessment is made up of the computer adaptive test (CAT) and performance tasks that are delivered by computer but are not adaptive. Computer adaptive testing is more efficient than fixed-form tests, requiring fewer questions to produce a more accurate picture of a student's strengths and weaknesses. Performance tasks—which may require one to two class periods to complete—will be used to better measure capacities such as depth of understanding, research skills, and complex analysis, which cannot be adequately assessed with selected- or constructed-response items. The length of both of these components will determine the overall test length.

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