# Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium Smarter Balanced Weekly Update

Issue 104 Week ending Friday, March 1, 2013

## **Top News This Week**

- ALDs and college content-readiness webinar on 3/5
- CAT algorithm webinar on 3/15

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 <a href="http://www.smarterbalanced.org">http://www.smarterbalanced.org</a> 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. Today is March 1, and it looks like the federal sequestration is moving forward. I want to provide a few clarifying observations about the sequestration and its impact on Smarter Balanced. I can keep this short: fundamentally, sequestration does not affect the Consortium. Funding for the two summative assessment consortia (Smarter Balanced and PARCC) is provided by the U.S. Department of Education through its Race to the Top Assessment program. That program, along with other ARRA recovery dollars, was authorized by Congress in 2009, and is not impacted by sequestration.

With regard to our ongoing Pilot testing, entering our third week of the Pilot the level of engagement by our states and schools continues to be impressive. We now have more than 860,000 students signed up to participate from more than 4,700 schools. Twenty of our 21 Governing States have already had students participate and we are experiencing a good distribution across member states. Over 28,000 students have completed their tests in grades 7, 8, and 9, and other grades are scheduled to roll in as the Pilot continues into May. The student registration system and testing platform are in full use. One of the things we track is the simultaneous usage of the software; the test delivery system is running well, with peaks of 1,200 simultaneous users. Although this is only a fraction of the number of simultaneous users we will see when we Field Test next year and go operational in 2015, the Pilot Test gives us a first opportunity to "pressure test" our test delivery software.

We have taken a comprehensive approach to communications around the Pilot, making available to member states practical information for end users and communications information for broader audiences. This approach includes:

- Test Administration Manuals and webinars;
- Weekly updates for K-12 state leads on recruitment efforts;
- Contractor (AIR and DRC) direct contact with schools that are signed up for testing;
- Contractor (AIR) help desk support prior to and during testing;
- Posting of Pilot Test participation statistics on the Smarter Balanced internal website; and
- Notices (as necessary) in the Weekly Update.

In addition, keep in touch with us through the Smarter Balanced website, Twitter, and our eNewsletter for additional announcements about our Pilot testing program. JW

### Announcements

ALDs and college content-readiness webinar on 3/5—As discussed during this week's All States meeting, the Smarter Balanced initial achievement level descriptors (ALDs) and college content-readiness policy (CCR) will be released for Governing States review on Tuesday, March 5. This release incorporates revisions made after the most recent comment period. To support the release, the Governing State K-12 leads are invited to attend a webinar briefing on the ALDs/CCR on Tuesday, March 5, from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. Pacific time. As the Chiefs will be asked to approve the ALDs and CCR as Consortium policy on March 20 at the Collaboration Conference, we encourage state leads to attend the webinar and review the released materials. Higher Education Leads are also welcome to attend the webinar. Please see the February 27 email sent from sbac@wested.org for details.

CAT algorithm webinar on 3/15—K-12 state leads and work group members: Please mark your calendars for a CAT algorithm webinar, scheduled for Friday, March 15, from 12:00 to 1:00 p.m. Pacific time. The purpose of the webinar is to orient state leads and work group members to the work underway and considerations in determining the CAT algorithm. The CAT algorithm is the logic used for item selection during the summative test event. As such, the CAT algorithm drives content coverage, test precision, and test length. This webinar will provide a high-level description of how the CAT algorithm addresses each of these critically important facets of the summative assessment. Work group members are welcome to attend. Please see the February 26 email sent from <a href="mailto:sbac@wested.org">sbac@wested.org</a> for details.

Recording of Pilot Test administration training webinar for test administrators posted on Pilot portal—A recording of the Pilot Test administration training webinar for state test coordinators and test administrators is posted on the Smarter Balanced Pilot Test portal. The PowerPoint presentation from the webinar is also posted, as are other Pilot Test resources. Please see the "Training and Tutorials" section of the Resources page at <a href="http://sbac.portal.airast.org/Pilot\_Test/resources.html?pilot">http://sbac.portal.airast.org/Pilot\_Test/resources.html?pilot</a>.

<u>Fiscal agent completes successful audit</u>—The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium's fiscal agent, the Washington State Office of the Superintendent of Public Instruction, just completed a formal audit of the request for proposals (RFP) process and internal controls for fiscal year 2012 (July 1, 2011—June 30, 2012). The audit was performed by the Washington State Auditor's Office. The primary objective of the audit was to determine whether the agency has established and maintained internal controls designed to reasonably ensure compliance with federal laws, regulations, and requirements applicable to the federal program. Smarter Balanced is happy to report that the Washington State Auditor's Office determined no audit findings were identified for the nine RFPs or resulting contracts that were analyzed.

Sustainability meeting on 3/13—State leads: the Sustainability Task Force has been working in conjunction with the Executive Staff and McKinsey & Company to compile and recommend an overall Sustainability Plan. Governing States will vote on the plan at the Smarter Balanced Collaboration Conference on March 20. In advance of that meeting, the set of recommendations will be reviewed with the K-12 and Higher Education Leads on Wednesday, March 13, from 12:00 to 2:00 p.m. Pacific time (3:00 to 5:00 p.m. eastern time). The objectives of the discussion will be to review the overall plan that the Task Force has compiled, and seek input on how to best set up and prepare for a successful endorsement of the plan on March 20. Please see the February 15 email sent from <a href="mailto:sbac@wested.org">sbac@wested.org</a> for details.

## **Upcoming Events**

Collaboration Conference March 19-22—Smarter Balanced is hosting its semiannual Collaboration Conference and Chiefs meeting, March 19–22, 2013, in Arlington, VA (near Reagan National Airport). Invited participants have received an email invitation from <a href="mailto:sbac@wested.org">sbac@wested.org</a> with instructions on registration for the conference. Events during this collaboration meeting are role-specific, so please be certain of the session days you are signing up to attend. Please refer to the email invitation sent from <a href="mailto:sbac@wested.org">sbac@wested.org</a> on January 25. If you have any questions regarding your attendance on a particular day, please check with the Project Management Partner (WestEd) at <a href="mailto:sbac@wested.org">sbac@wested.org</a>.

#### Resources

<u>Contacting Smarter Balanced</u>—The Smarter Balanced external website (<u>www.smarterbalanced.org</u>) 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 <a href="http://www.smarterbalanced.org/contact-us/">http://www.smarterbalanced.org/contact-us/</a>. Consortium members may contact <a href="mailto:sbac@wested.org">sbac@wested.org</a> for information on upcoming meetings and events.

<u>Collaboration Site</u>—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 <a href="mailto:sbac@wested.org">sbac@wested.org</a>.

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

<u>Prior versions of the Weekly Update</u>—State members: Previous Smarter Balanced Weekly Updates are available on the internal Smarter Balanced website at <a href="https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/communications/weekly-update-archive.">https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/communications/weekly-update-archive.</a>

<u>Smarter Balanced meeting minutes</u>—State members: Agendas and minutes from previously held meetings are available on the internal Smarter Balanced website at <a href="https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/meetings">https://sites.google.com/a/smarterbalanced.org/home/meetings</a>.

### **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.

Are external keyboards required for tablets?

Yes, external keyboards are required for tablets. Any form of external keyboard that disables the onscreen virtual keyboard is acceptable. This includes mechanical, manual, plug and play, and wirelessbased (e.g., Bluetooth, RF, IR) keyboards.

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