

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

Smarter Balanced Weekly Update

Issue 118

Week ending Friday, June 7, 2013

Top News This Week

- Pilot Test Operating System Usage Data received
- Smarter Balanced to present at the symposium on the reports of Gordon Commission on Wednesday, June 12

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. I am delighted to report that the Smarter Balanced Practice Test has made media headlines and is a major topic among educators, the general public, and advocates and critics. As one might expect, however, the growing interest in Smarter Balanced generates some misunderstandings and occasional distortion of facts. I believe it is critical to our success to dispel these fictions before they create a broad misunderstanding of the Smarter Balanced assessments. We have developed a series of Talking Points, called Smarter Balanced Fiction vs. Facts, for our Chiefs, K-12 and Higher Education State Leads, PIOs and other stakeholders to help clear the air of fiction before it takes hold. Leadership in our member states will receive a copy of these Talking Points by email on Monday, June 10, and they will be posted on our SmarterBalanced.org. I am including an advanced look of these Talking Points below. Thanks for your continued support. JW

Talking Points SMARTER BALANCED FICTION vs. FACTS

Fiction: These tests represent a new federal intrusion into education.

Fact: For decades Congress has required assessments of student learning for accountability under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The 2001 reauthorization of ESEA, known as the "No Child Left Behind Act" enacted during the Bush Administration, expanded those federal testing requirements to include state testing of every student in language arts and mathematics in grades three through eight and once in high school. In 2010, the federal government funded the State of Washington to act on behalf of a consortium of states to develop new, next-generation assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards in English language arts/literacy and mathematics. While federal funding currently supports the research and development work of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium, all policy decisions about the structure and content of the assessments are made by the member states based on input from stakeholders across the country. At the conclusion of the federal grant in September 2014, Smarter Balanced will become an operational assessment system supported by its member states. The Consortium does not plan to seek additional funds from the U.S. Department of Education.

Fiction: Nothing is known about these new tests.

Fact: Smarter Balanced aims for complete transparency. All of the key documents describing the assessment (content specifications, item specifications, item writing training materials, test blueprints, accommodations framework, achievement level descriptors, technology specifications, etc.) are available to the public on the Smarter Balanced website (www.SmarterBalanced.org). Practice tests also are

available at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/practice-test/> to the general public on the Smarter Balanced website for each tested grade (3 through 8 and 11) and both subject areas (English language arts/literacy and mathematics).

Fiction: The costs of these tests are unknown.

Fact: Smarter Balanced has released cost estimates for its assessments that include expenses for ongoing research and development of the assessment system as well as test administration and scoring. The end-of-year summative assessment alone is estimated to cost \$22.50 per student. The full suite of summative, interim, and formative assessments is estimated to cost \$27.30 per student. These costs are less than the amount that two-thirds of the Consortium's member states currently pay. These costs are estimates because a sizable portion of the cost is for test administration and scoring services that will not be provided by Smarter Balanced; states will either provide these services directly or procure them from vendors in the private sector.

Fiction: These new assessments are untested.

Fact: Smarter Balanced has incrementally tested the content of the assessment and the technology that will support the assessment. Smarter Balanced has already completed:

- Cognitive Labs: Individual students provided feedback to test developers about their experience with the innovative test questions, accommodations for students with special needs, and the testing software.
- Small-scale Trials: Promising types of questions and software features were further tried out with hundreds of students.
- Pilot Test: Students at about 5,000 schools across the Consortium responded to a preliminary pool of test questions and performance tasks.

In spring 2014, the Consortium will conduct its field test to present the entire pool of Smarter Balanced items to students across member states. The field test is expected to involve students in 15 to 20 percent of Consortium schools, and will gather the information necessary for final evaluation of item quality.

Fiction: These tests will result in the collection of intrusive and inappropriate data on children.

Fact: States will make all policy decisions with regard to the collection, storage, and use of student assessment data. Smarter Balanced will adhere to all federal and state privacy laws, including but not limited to the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA) (<http://www.ed.gov/policy/gen/guid/fpc/ferpa/index.html>). The Consortium will not share personally identifiable student-level data with the federal government. The Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) of 2008 (<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/highered/leg/hea08/index.html>), the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation amending the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (<http://www2.ed.gov/nclb/landing.jhtml?src=pb>), the Education Sciences Reform Act of 2002 (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/PLAW-107publ279/pdf/PLAW-107publ279.pdf>), and the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (<http://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/BILLS-108hr1350enr/pdf/BILLS-108hr1350enr.pdf>) all prohibit the creation of a federal database with students' personally identifiable information.

Fiction: These tests will require advanced technology that schools don't have and can't afford.

Fact: The Smarter Balanced assessment is being designed to work with the computing resources in schools today. The assessments can be offered on very old operating systems and require only the minimum processors and memory required to run the operating system itself (for example, the summative assessment can be delivered using computers with 233 MHz processors and 128 MB RAM that run Windows XP). Likewise, the file size for individual assessment items will be very small to minimize the network bandwidth necessary to deliver the assessment online. For example, a 600-student middle school could test its students using only one 30-computer lab. To assist states that have not yet made the transition to online testing, the Consortium also will offer a paper-and-pencil option for the first three years of operational testing.

Fiction: These assessments will result in standardization of teaching and learning.

Fact: A founding principle of Smarter Balanced is that teachers and students need high-quality data, tools, and resources to support improvements in student learning. Smarter Balanced isn't just an end-of-year accountability test. It is an assessment system that features flexible, non-secure interim assessments to be offered at teachers' and schools' discretion throughout the school year and a digital library of formative assessment tools, practices, and professional development resources built by teachers, for teachers to improve the quality of information collected through the daily classroom activities of assignments, quizzes, and observation of student work. The end-of-year tests will help schools evaluate how well their students performed by comparing their aggregate data with aggregate data from other schools across the nation. The end-of-year assessments also will empower students and parents by providing them with a clear indication of how well their children are progressing toward mastering the academic knowledge and skills necessary for college and career readiness.

Announcements

Pilot Test Operating System Usage Data received—Smarter Balanced is beginning to receive information from the Pilot Test that concluded on May 24. The first report provides a breakdown of operating systems based on the Internet browsers used to connect to the Pilot Test. Across all tests that were begun, 81.29% of devices used Windows, 14.74% used OSX (Intel), 1.89% used iOS, 1.05% used Chrome OS, 0.78% used OSX (PPC), and 0.25% used Linux. Smarter Balanced will release additional information from the Pilot Test as it becomes available.

Smarter Balanced to present at symposium on the reports of Gordon Commission on Wednesday, June 12—The reports call for state and federal policymakers to make substantial changes to K-12 assessments and re-direct the existing focus on the use of test results. The event is co-sponsored by the UCLA Graduate School of Education & Information Studies, the University of Southern California Rossier School of Education, and the Gordon Commission on the Future of Assessment in Education. In addition to Dr. Gordon's presentation, the afternoon symposium will include brief presentations from Commission members Eva Baker and Louis Gomez from UCLA's Graduate School of Education & Information Studies as well as other leading education experts. Tony Alpert, Smarter Balanced Chief Operating Officer, will present an overview of the Consortium's development of new technology-based assessments that measure the Common Core State Standards.

Practice Test launched on Wednesday, May 29—Smarter Balanced released the Practice Tests for grades 3–8 and 11 in both English language arts/literacy and mathematics. The Practice Tests include test questions with some of the same features that students will experience in 2014-15, including selected-response items, constructed-response items, technology-enhanced items, and performance tasks in ELA/literacy.

The Practice Tests do not include all the features of the operational assessments. For example, students and teachers will not receive reports or scores from the Practice Tests. Although Smarter Balanced assessments will be computer adaptive, the Practice Tests follow a fixed-form model. By fall 2013, Smarter Balanced will make enhancements to the Practice Tests, including the addition of performance tasks in mathematics, accommodations for students with disabilities in additional grades, and scoring rubrics.

The tests provide a preview of the Smarter Balanced assessments, but they do not encompass the full range of content that students may encounter on the operational assessments and should not be used to guide instructional decisions.

The Practice Tests are freely available on the Smarter Balanced website at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/practice-test/>. These tests can be accessed by students, teachers, parents, and other interested parties throughout this summer and the 2013-14 school year.

Item Quality Review Panel convened on May 20–21—The Item Quality Review Panel convened in Las Vegas to discuss three critical aspects of the item development process: quality criteria, item specifications, and archetypes. The panel members (listed below) who represent content expertise and

expertise in services to underrepresented students met as a whole group to discuss the design of the Smarter Balanced assessment and the goals of the Field Test item development. Then, in content-specific groups, the panel members, Smarter Balanced staff and work group representatives, and contractor staff discussed key areas of focus and made recommendations to improve item development.

Dr. P. David Pearson
Dr. Donald Deshler
Dr. Douglas Hartman
Edward Bosso
Dr. Elfrieda Hiebert
Dr. Guadalupe Valdes
Dr. Sandra Murphy
Dr. Alan Schoenfeld
Dr. Bill McCallum
Estelle Woodbury
Dr. Francis (Skip) Fennell
Dr. Guillermo Solano-Flores
Dr. Jason Zimba
Dr. Karen Fuson
Dr. Patrick Callahan
Steve Leinwand

Technology Readiness Calculator available—A Technology Readiness Calculator is available to help schools estimate the number of days and associated network bandwidth required to complete Smarter Balanced assessments. This tool allows districts and schools to enter the number of students, number of computers, and number of hours per day that computers are available for testing. The calculator is available through the Technology page of the Smarter Balanced website at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/technology/>.

In The News

KPCC-FM, 5/29/13

Article: "Sneak peek at new California standardized tests"

<http://www.scpr.org/blogs/education/2013/05/29/13833/sneak-peek-at-new-california-standardized-tests/>

Teton Valley News, 5/31/13

Article: "Practice tests for new Idaho academic standards available"

http://www.tetonvalleynews.net/news/practice-tests-for-new-idaho-academic-standards-available/article_76890006-ca05-11e2-ba60-0019bb2963f4.html

Idaho State Department of Education, 5/30/13

Article: "Next Generation Assessment Examples Now Available Statewide"

<http://educationidaho.blogspot.com/2013/05/next-generation-assessment-examples-now.html>

Maine Department of Education, 6/6/13

Article: "Business leaders support Common Core standards"

<http://mainedoews.net/2013/06/06/business-leaders-support-common-core-standards/>

New Hampshire Public Radio, 6/6/13

Article: "New 'Smarter Balanced' Test Will Ask More Of Students"

<http://www.nhpr.org/post/new-smarter-balanced-test-will-ask-more-students>

Support the Common Core

The Common Core State Standards are designed to provide clear, consistent learning goals that will help prepare all students for success in college and the workplace. Development of the standards was state-led and bipartisan.

Recently, educators, newspaper editorial boards, and business and community leaders have stepped forward to explain why they support the Common Core. It is more important than ever to share accurate information about the standards and how they support student success—through newsletters, websites, and social media. The resources below can help dispel misperceptions and showcase the broad support for the Common Core.

- Michael Gerson, former speechwriter for President George W. Bush, wrote about the importance of establishing higher education standards in the Washington Post: <http://wapo.st/117BD01>.
- Jack Warner, executive director and CEO of the South Dakota Board of Regents, explained how the standards support economic prosperity in the Argus Leader: <http://argusne.ws/19tO3HC>.
- The editorial board of the Kansas City Star explained why moving forward with the Common Core is the right approach for students: <http://bit.ly/13CXyhq>.
- The Foundation for Excellence in Education set the record straight on common myths about the standards: <http://bit.ly/12mdkmQ>.
- Former Arkansas Governor Mike Huckabee discussed the standards on his radio show with Business Roundtable President and former Michigan Governor John Engler: <http://bit.ly/15a0KYB>.
- A group of more than 70 business leaders explained why they support the Common Core in a letter printed in the New York Times: <http://bit.ly/117fRd8>.

California Department of Education, 5/29/2013
News release: “Assembly Approves Overhaul of Public School Testing”
<http://www.cde.ca.gov/nr/ne/yr13/yr13rel61.asp>

T.H.E. Journal, 5/29/2013
Article: “Smarter Balanced Releases Practice Common Core Tests”
<http://thejournal.com/articles/2013/05/29/smarter-balanced-releases-practice-common-core-tests.aspx>

Education Week, 5/29/2013
Blog post: “Common-Core Online Practice Tests Unveiled”
http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/DigitalEducation/2013/05/common_core_unveils_practice_t.html

New Hampshire Public Radio, 5/29/2013
Article: “Practice Test For NECAP Replacement Released”
<http://www.nhpr.org/post/practice-test-necap-replacement-released>

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.

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

Do students and administrators need to be entered in TIDE before beginning the Practice Test?

No. Individuals taking the Practice Test will not need to be registered in the system via TIDE in order to take the Practice Test. You can access the Practice Test here: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/practice-test/>.

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

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