

## Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

### Smarter Balanced Weekly Update

Issue 120

Week ending Friday, June 21, 2013

#### Top News This Week

- State Toolkit on Communication and Messaging available
- Career Readiness Task Force selected
- Governing States and State Leadership Teams invited to attend webinar on Quality Criteria for the Digital Library
- State Leads invited to Procurement Consortia Webinar

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. On June 18, 2013, Secretary of Education Duncan announced that the Department of Education will allow states to use either the field test of next-generation assessment or their existing assessments in 2013-14 school year for accountability purposes, a decision that mitigates concerns about students needing to "double test" if they are to participate in both their state's accountability test in 2014 and a consortium's field test in that same year.

The Department issued 3 key documents and an ESEA Flexibility State-by-State Implementation Timeline Chart:

- Key Policy Letter from the Education Secretary and Deputy Secretary  
<http://www2.ed.gov/policy/elsec/guid/secletter/130618.html>
- New Flexibility for States Implementing Fast-Moving Reforms: Laying Out Our Thinking  
<http://www.ed.gov/blog/2013/06/new-flexibility-for-states-implementing-fast-moving-reforms-laying-out-our-thinking/>
- Fact Sheet: Accountability Timeline for New College- and Career-Ready Standards. The Fact Sheet is a web-linked, downloadable Word document that's available on the "Key Policy Letter" page shown above. It provides useful elaboration of the Department's decision and perspective on the new flexibility.

Yesterday, a couple of us had the opportunity for a brief discussion with our program officers at the Department, who oversee our assessment grant. We discussed several details about this new flexibility that appears to require additional clarification. Through that discussion we agreed to collaborate by helping the Department understand the kinds of questions our states have. Smarter Balanced is committed to working closely with the Department on behalf of our Governing States to meet our common goals to

- Continue support of quality accountability systems,
- Assist our member states in their transition from current assessment and accountability systems to new measures of the Common Core State Standards, and
- Ensure that transition plans implemented by our states are well-articulated for all stakeholders.

The Consortium will discuss the implications of this new policy during the Governing States meeting Tuesday, June 25, 2013. JW

### **Announcements**

State Toolkit on Communication and Messaging available—Smarter Balanced is pleased to provide an exciting new resource to support its member states. The State Toolkit for Communication and Implementation includes:

- **Six Resource Modules:** a set of three communications modules about Smarter Balanced and specific state's context, operations modules on cost and technology, and an implementation module. Each of these modules includes sample materials from other states as well as tools and templates for helping the state's team customize to the state's needs.
- **A Workshop-based Approach to customizing each Module:** facilitator guides, agendas, and additional questions and tips. We recommend this approach because, based on experiences in other states, it will enable your team and key stakeholders to create customized modules in an efficient fashion, while also building buy-in and alignment along the way.

Executive Director Joe Willhoft announced this new resource in a message to Chiefs and asked them to designate a senior staff person in the state education agency to oversee the work necessary to customize these resources for state use. States may either convene a task force for this purpose or assign this responsibility to an existing committee. In either case, inclusion of key stakeholders including higher education is recommended. Smarter Balanced is holding a webinar for Chiefs' designees on Wednesday, June 26, as a first step in the State Toolkit for Communication and Implementation process.

Career Readiness Task Force selected—Smarter Balanced is pleased to announce the selection of the Career Readiness Task Force. The task force is composed of career education leaders from K-12 and higher education, who were nominated by Governing States. The task force is charged with reviewing available models and developing recommendations for describing student performance on the Smarter Balanced summative assessment in relation to academic readiness for postsecondary career education and training. The task force will begin its work this summer and will deliver its recommendations to the Consortium prior to Thanksgiving. States will then have several opportunities to review and comment on a draft policy prior to a state vote planned for the spring 2014 Collaboration Conference.

Governing States and State Leadership Teams invited to attend webinar on Quality Criteria for the Digital Library—Governing States and State Leadership Teams are invited to participate in a webinar to introduce the Digital Library Quality Criteria on Wednesday, June 26. The webinar will provide background on the development of the Quality Criteria as well as an overview of the rating system to be used for resources. In addition, Formative Assessment Practices/Transition to the Common Core Work Group members will explain how State Leadership Teams and State Networks of Educators will use the Quality Criteria to evaluate resources for the Digital Library starting in late August.

State Leads invited to Procurement Consortia Webinar—K-12 state leads are invited to attend a webinar on Monday, June 24, regarding the formation of procurement consortia. The webinar will provide a forum where states can share information on opportunities to form procurement consortia.

Governing States invited to participate in State-Managed Item Development for the Field Test—CTB/McGraw-Hill, Contractor for 16/17, reached out to Governing States on June 10 with an invitation to participate in item development for the Field Test. The contractor will work with states to design an item development plan of items in the content areas, claims, and targets selected by states. Training for states, information about state responsibilities, and arrangements for compensation for item development will be provided to meet state needs. CTB/McGraw-Hill asked states to complete and return the provided letter of intent by June 25 to indicate their interest.

### **In The News**

*The Whiteboard Advisors June 2013 Survey, 6/18/2013*

<http://www.whiteboardadvisors.com> (you must register to read the survey: <http://eepurl.com/nW3D>)  
The survey introduction notes that there were significant shifts in perceptions of the assessment consortia:

- Insiders give higher marks to both Common Core assessment consortia, but 63 percent still see the PARCC consortia as being on the wrong track. Fifty-four percent of insiders now say the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium is on the right track, marking a significant shift this month.
- On slide 9 you can see the right track/wrong track results over the past 13 months. The “right track” number for Smarter Balanced increased in June to 54 percent—up from 26 percent in May and the highest figure since the survey began. PARCC also increased more modestly to 37 percent from 22 percent in June.

In addition, there were some positive verbatim comments from respondents (although others continue to be negative), including:

- “Smarter [Balanced] has already started to pilot its assessments, has been very savvy about procurement, and has a decent sustainability plan. Almost none of this has been covered by the media and/or discussed by education policy folks (do they even know?). As far as implementation goes Smarter seems to be leading the pack.”
- “SBAC is chugging along and PARCC is back on track.”

Again, it’s important to caution against reading too much into the month-to-month results of this small and anonymous survey. However, the release of the Practice Tests certainly provided an opportunity for the Consortium to showcase the significant progress to date.

*Idaho Education News*, 6/21/13

Article: “Common Core: Idaho to road-test exams in 2014”

<http://www.idahoednews.org/news/common-core-idaho-will-road-test-exams-in-2014/>

*Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education*, 6/2013

Article: “Criteria for Higher-Quality Assessment”

[http://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/criteria-higher-quality-assessment\\_0.pdf](http://edpolicy.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/criteria-higher-quality-assessment_0.pdf)

*Education Week*, 6/11/13

Article: “Schools Test-Drive Common Core”

<http://www.edweek.org/dd/articles/2013/06/12/03commoncore.h06.html>

*Education Week*, 6/11/13

Article: “States Seek Flexibility During Common-Test Transition”

[http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/06/12/35standards\\_ep.h32.html?tkn=XPMFuJB0zG8GE%2B6d6qTPU3r7178zpCgfEA3G&cmp=clp-edweek](http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/06/12/35standards_ep.h32.html?tkn=XPMFuJB0zG8GE%2B6d6qTPU3r7178zpCgfEA3G&cmp=clp-edweek)

*USA Today*, 6/11/13

Article: “Myths fuel attacks on ‘Common Core’ standards: Our view”

<http://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2013/06/11/common-core-standards-editorials-debates/2413555/>

## Resources

Contacting Smarter Balanced—The Smarter Balanced external website ([www.smarterbalanced.org](http://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](mailto: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](mailto: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](mailto:sbac@wested.org)

*Are sample Smarter Balanced assessment questions available?*

In April 2013, Smarter Balanced released online Practice Tests (<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/pilot-test/>) that provide an early look at sets of assessment questions aligned to the Common Core for grades 3–8 and 11 in both English language arts/literacy and mathematics. The Practice Tests allow teachers, students, parents, and other interested parties to experience the features of online testing and gain insight into how Smarter Balanced will assess students' mastery of the Common Core.

### **Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium**

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