

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

Smarter Balanced Weekly Update

Issue 124

Week ending Friday, July 19, 2013

Top News This Week

- North Dakota approved as a Governing State
- NGA Center request for proposals for policy academy grant
- Executive Committee member vote now open

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 the 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. The Foundation for Excellence in Education and the Fordham Institute launched a new website on the Common Core State Standards (CCSS), which highlights support from prominent conservative leaders. You can view the website here: <http://highercorestandards.org/>.

Additionally, I want to alert you to an important report issued last month by the Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education (SCOPE); the Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST); and the Learning Sciences Research Institute (LSRI).

Criteria for High-Quality Assessment provides a framework to help assessment developers and policymakers as they create and adopt assessments that promote 21st-century skills. Below is a brief summary of key findings from the report. The full report can be downloaded at <http://edpolicy.stanford.edu/publications/pubs/847>. JW

What Should High-Quality Assessment Systems Include?

No single assessment can evaluate all of the kinds of learning we value for students or meet all of the goals held by parents, practitioners, and policymakers. In a coordinated system of assessments, different tools should be used for different purposes: formative and summative, diagnostic, and large-scale reporting. However, all assessments should faithfully represent the standards and model good teaching and learning practice. We urge that systems be evaluated by these five criteria:

1: Assessment of Higher-Order Cognitive Skills

New assessments should tap the higher-level cognitive skills that allow students to transfer their learning to new situations and problems. These skills are rarely measured by current U.S. tests. A recent study of tests in 17 states found that fewer than 2% of mathematics items and only 21% of English language arts items addressed higher-level skills. These skills include, for example, the abilities to evaluate, compare, hypothesize, and investigate, and the abilities to analyze, synthesize, design, and create.

In new assessments, these abilities should be the focus of at least one third of the total points in mathematics and at least half of the total points in English language arts. Plans for new consortia assessments intend to meet these benchmarks. This will require a shift from multiple-choice items to more elaborated responses.

2: High-Fidelity Assessment of Critical Abilities

Assessments should evaluate the critical abilities articulated in the standards, such as communication (speaking, reading, writing, and listening in multimedia forms), collaboration, modeling, complex problem solving, research, experimentation, and evaluation.

Tasks should measure these abilities as they will be used in the real world, rather than through an artificial proxy. For example, while a test might ask a student to point out evidence for a claim in a text, this would not demonstrate that the student knows how to find, evaluate, and use appropriate evidence to build an argument or evaluate a situation. These skills should be directly represented in authentic research tasks.

The new consortium assessments will measure some of these key abilities, such as listening, writing with revision, and modeling. States and districts will need to augment the tests with performance assessments in order to assess other abilities, such as long-term investigations and spoken, visual, and technology-supported presentations, as many did during the 1990s.

3: Standards That Are Internationally Benchmarked

Assessments should be as rigorous as those of the leading education countries, in terms of the kinds of tasks they present as well as the levels of performance they expect.

On the Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) tests, most items require constructed responses to questions that ask students to analyze and apply knowledge to novel problems or contexts. In 2015, PISA will add assessment of collaborative problem solving to its assessments of reading, mathematics, and scientific literacy; assessment of computer literacy will follow.

From Finland to Singapore and from Australia to New Zealand, students write even further extended responses to questions that require them to evaluate and analyze texts, data, and problems, rather than bubbling in responses to multiple-choice questions. Many examination systems now feature project components that require students to investigate problems and design solutions, conduct research, analyze data, write extended papers, and deliver oral presentations describing their results.

4: Use of Items That Are Instructionally Sensitive and Educationally Valuable

Assessment tasks should also represent the curriculum content in ways that respond to instruction and have value for guiding and informing teaching.

Instructionally sensitive items are designed so that the underlying concepts can be taught and learned, rather than reflecting students' differential access to outside-of-school experiences (frequently associated with their socioeconomic status or cultural context) or depending mostly on test-taking skills. It is not a good use of valuable instructional time to spend hours teaching students to "psych out" the tests rather than to develop the skills they will need to use in the real world. In many countries, the use of assessments of, as, and for learning is a goal.

Performance-based assessments are designed to offer good models for teaching and learning and insights into how students think as well as what they know. Assessments that provide these insights, used to guide instruction and revision of work, can be powerful influences on learning and achievement.

5: Assessments That Are Valid, Reliable, and Fair

To be valid for any purpose, an assessment should represent well the knowledge and skills it intends to measure, be used appropriately for intended purposes, and have positive consequences for instruction and for test takers, guiding better decisions rather than restricting opportunities.

In order for assessments to be truly valid for a wide range of learners, they should accurately evaluate students' abilities and do so reliably across testing contexts and scorers. They should also be fair and accessible: free from bias and designed to reduce unnecessary obstacles to performance that could undermine validity for some subgroups (for example, language complexities not related to the construct being measured).

Use of the principles of Universal Design, together with the design of accommodations and modifications, should create maximum access to the assessment for a wide range of learners, and the assessments should sufficiently cover the continuum of achievement so that they enable a wide range of students to show what they know and how they have progressed. Finally, the assessments should be transparent enough to support relevant opportunities to learn.

Announcements

North Dakota approved as a Governing State—The Consortium is pleased to announce that the Executive Committee has approved North Dakota as a Smarter Balanced Governing State. “I am pleased to welcome North Dakota as a Governing State in the Consortium,” said Joe Willhoft, Ph.D., Executive Director of Smarter Balanced. “This decision represents an important step toward preparing all North Dakota students for college and the workplace.” Smarter Balanced extends a warm welcome to North Dakota and looks forward to its collaboration as we continue to develop the assessment system.

NGA Center request for proposals for policy academy grant—The National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center), partnering with the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), the National Conference of State Legislatures (NCSL), and the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO), requests proposals for a policy academy grant titled “Improving Student Learning at Scale.” Teams from up to six states will receive support with the implementation of the CCSS. Strong preference will go to states that have adopted the CCSS and have not received a Race to the Top Round 1 or 2 grant. Proposals are due on August 21. For further information, please contact Kate Nielson at (202) 614-5319 or knielson@nga.org.

Executive Committee member vote now open—Governing States are invited to vote for the position of K-12 Executive Committee member, to fill the remainder of the term held by Dan Hupp. The term of this position runs through September 30, 2014. This position is one of four at-large K-12 seats on the Executive Committee. (The other seats on the Executive Committee are two co-chairs, two higher education representatives, and one representative for the State of Washington as fiscal agent.) Voting closes on Tuesday, July 23.

Director of State Services joined Smarter Balanced staff—Smarter Balanced is pleased to welcome Dacia Hopfensperger as Director of State Services. The Director of State Services has primary responsibility for coordinating outreach efforts to member state K-12 education agencies with regard to critical elements of the design and implementation of the Smarter Balanced assessment system. The Director will serve as the Consortium’s primary point of contact for each member state’s lead K-12 representative (K-12 Lead), designing communication efforts to keep K-12 Leads well informed about Consortium activities and fielding questions and concerns as they arise. Hopfensperger brings with her a diverse skill set in the field of K-12 education, including experience as an assistant district superintendent, a school psychologist, and an assessment specialist at the state and district levels. “We are delighted to have Dacia join the Smarter Balanced team,” said Jacqueline King, Ph.D., Smarter Balanced Director of Higher Education Collaboration. “She brings strong experience in assessment, a passion for the capacity of standards and assessments to help transform teaching and learning, and a commitment to providing states with the help they need to successfully implement the Smarter Balanced assessment system. I am confident that she will quickly become an invaluable resource to our member states.”

In The News

EdWeek, 7/17/13

Article: “North Dakota Drops Out of PARCC, Commits to Smarter Balanced”

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2013/07/north_dakota_drops_out_of_parcc.html

T.H.E. Journal, 7/10/13

Article: “Getting Your School Tech Ready for Common Core Assessments”

http://thejournal.com/Articles/2013/07/10/Getting-Your-School-Tech-Ready-for-Common-Core-Assessments_0.aspx?Page=4&p=1

Hartford Courant, 7/10/13

Article: "State Seeks To Avoid 'Double-Testing', Promote Early Use Of New Computerized Test"
<http://www.courant.com/news/education/hc-malloy-flexibility-0711-20130710,0,6440898.story>

EdWeek, 7/10/13

Article: "Adaptive Testing Gains Momentum, Prompts Concerns"

http://www.edweek.org/ew/articles/2013/07/10/36adaptive_ep.h32.html?r=677920852

EdWeek, 7/8/13

Article: "Educations Department Panel Says Test Consortia Need Sharper Focus on Accessibility"

http://blogs.edweek.org/edweek/curriculum/2013/07/ed_dept_technical_review_of.html

SI&A Cabinet Report, 7/8/13

Article: "Costs to Implement New Student Testing System Starting to Pile Up"

<http://www.siacabinetreport.com/articles/viewarticle.aspx?article=4875>

Resources

Key Facts About the Common Core State Standards—Alliance for Excellent Education publications on the CCSS can be found at the following links: <http://www.all4ed.org/files/CCSSFacts.pdf> and <http://www.all4ed.org/files/CommonCore101.pdf>.

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

What will the assessments cost?

Smarter Balanced has released cost estimates for its assessments; these estimates include expenses for ongoing research and development of the assessment system, as well as for 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 amounts that two thirds of the Consortium's member states currently pay. These costs are estimates because a sizable portion of the costs are 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.

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

WestEd—Project Management Partner

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