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Smarter News



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



This month, **Smarter Balanced is launching a Pilot Test** of the assessment system. This marks an important milestone in the development of assessments that will give teachers and parents a clearer picture of where students are succeeding and where they need help.

The Smarter Balanced Pilot Test represents the first large-scale tryout of items and performance tasks, and it will allow the Consortium to understand how the test and the technology behind it perform. More than one million students in Smarter Balanced Governing States are slated to participate in the Pilot Test—and schools in all member states may volunteer. More information about the Pilot Test is included in this month's Smarter News and on [our website](#).

With the start of the Pilot Test, the development of the assessment system is moving into a new phase. I'm pleased to report that our work remains on time and on track thanks to the extraordinary work of member states, partners, and educators.

INSIDE THE STATE-LED CONSORTIUM



Member States Discuss Small-scale Trials

In November, representatives from Smarter Balanced member states met for a three-day convening to review results from the initial tryouts of the assessment system.

Conducted in fall 2012, the Smarter Balanced small-scale trials provided important information about how students respond to assessment items in a real-world, classroom setting. Five-hundred schools in 23 member states participated in the trials, which were held in 60-90 minute

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Specifications Available

SMARTER BALANCED ASSESSMENT CONSORTIUM

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Joe Willhoft, Ph.D. - Executive Director
Tony Alpert - Chief Operating Officer
Eddie T. Arnold, APR - Director,
Strategic Communications and Public
Information Officer
Magda Chia, Ph.D. - Director, Support

periods and used student responses to evaluate and test automated scoring strategies, including an evaluation of the scoring software used for the assessments.

Schools that participated in the trials reported a smooth and successful experience. Ninety percent of respondents reported that they were able to use the online system with ease, and all students were able to complete the test items.

At the convening, a “range-finding” committee meeting brought together 30 scorers from 14 member states to provide input on the scoring software that will be used for the assessments. Participants worked to ensure that the computer scoring system is able to score students’ responses as accurately as a human scorer. Participants involved in this process included experts from higher education, teachers, consultants, and state department personnel.

The completion of the small-scale trials sets the stage for the next phase in the development of the assessment system. Over the next two years, Smarter Balanced will conduct a larger-scale Pilot and Field tests to prepare tens of thousands of items for operational administration in the 2014-2015 school year.

for Under-Represented Students
 Shelbi Cole, Ph.D. - Director,
 Mathematics
 Barbara Kapinus, Ph.D. - Director,
 English Language Arts / Literacy
 Jacqueline E. King, Ph.D. - Director,
 Higher Education Collaboration
 Marty McCall, Ph.D. - Lead
 Psychometrician
 Chrystyna V. Mursky, Ph.D. - Director,
 Professional Learning

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 Montana
 North Carolina
 New Hampshire
 Nevada
 Oregon
 South Carolina
 South Dakota
 Vermont
 Washington
 Wisconsin
 West Virginia

Advisory States

North Dakota
 Pennsylvania
 Wyoming

SUPPORTING CLASSROOM TEACHERS



Pilot Test Begins

The [Smarter Balanced Pilot Test](#) will be administered to students in grades 3–11 in select classrooms across the country. Through the Pilot Test, Smarter Balanced will gather information about the

performance of assessment items and the test delivery system under real-world conditions.

The Pilot Test is voluntary. To ensure that data from the Pilot Test fully represents the Consortium, approximately 10 percent of schools in Smarter Balanced Governing States were recruited as a scientific sample. Schools not selected as part of the scientific sample may volunteer to participate through an [online survey](#).

To ensure a comprehensive preview of the system for both developers and end-users, the Smarter Balanced pilot consists of two phases:

- **Scientific Sample Pilot (February 20-May 24):** Schools recruited as part of the scientific sample will administer one content area (either mathematics or English language arts/literacy) in up to two grades. Although the assessment is untimed, it is expected to last approximately three hours. The test will take place during a pre-determined two-week

IN THE NEWS

- Chief Operating Officer Tony Alpert discussed the Common Core and the next-generation Smarter Balanced assessments with [EdSurge](#) in an in-depth interview.
- [The Record-Searchlight](#) reports on California’s plan to phase out the Standardized Testing and Reporting (STAR) to prepare for the Common Core and the Smarter Balanced assessments.
- [Education Week](#) reported on the

window under secure conditions. Schools will have access to training, help desk support, and technical guidance.

- **Volunteer Pilot (Early April to late May):** The volunteer portion of the Pilot Test is open to all interested schools that registered online and provides the opportunity to experience the assessment and some of its basic features. Schools will have flexibility to administer the Pilot Test in a way that best meets their needs. Classrooms, full grades, or multiple grades may take one or both content areas of the assessment at any point during the volunteer pilot window. Schools will have access to online instructions and FAQs.

It is important to note that the Pilot Test is designed to be a test of the items and performance tasks—not an opportunity to report on student learning—and schools participating in the Pilot Test will not receive student scores.

Learn more about the Smarter Balanced Pilot Test on [our website](#).

GOVERNING STATES APPROVE PRELIMINARY TEST BLUEPRINTS



Smarter Balanced Governing States adopted preliminary blueprints for the summative assessments of mathematics and English Language arts/literacy for grades 3-8 and high school. Developed with broad input from member states, partners, and

stakeholders, the test blueprints communicate the content of the test and how that content will be assessed.

The test blueprints include critical information about the number of items, score points, and depth of knowledge for items associated with each assessment target. Specifically the blueprints identify:

- **Content** (standards, indicators, claims) that is to be included for each assessed content area and grade across various levels of the system (student, classroom, school, district, state);
- **Emphasis and Balance** of content, generally indicated as the number of items or percentage points per standard and indicator;
- **Item Types**, sending a clear message to item developers about how to measure each standard and indicator, and to teach teachers and students about learning expectations; and
- **Depth of Knowledge**, indicating the complexity of item types for each standard. The test blueprint is essential for both assessment developers and for those responsible for curriculum and instruction.

cognitive labs sessions, which studied how students approach and interact with different types of computer-administered items.

- Executive Director Joe Willhoft provided an overview of the Consortium and an update on the assessments for the American Association of School Administrators [School Administrator](#) magazine.
- [Education Week's Digital Education](#) blog posted an entry on the Consortium's recently released technology framework and system requirements specifications.

REVISED ALDs & COLLEGE CONTENT-READINESS POLICY RELEASED

In November, [Smarter Balanced released](#) draft initial achievement level descriptors (ALDs) for public review and comment. Developed by K-12 teachers, higher education faculty, and content experts, the initial ALDs describe levels of student performance in English language arts/literacy and mathematics on the Smarter Balanced assessments. Based on feedback from member states, partners, and individual stakeholders, Smarter Balanced released revised ALDs in early February. The revised documents are available [here](#).

CRESST REPORT ON CONSORTIUM STATUS

On January 16 the Alliance for Excellent Education hosted a [webinar](#) to discuss findings from UCLA's National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) report [On the Road to Assessing Deeper Learning: The Status of Smarter Balanced and PARCC Assessment Consortia](#). The CRESST report summarizes the

The blueprints will be used to ensure an adequate pool of items and performance tasks, will provide evidence of alignment to the Common Core State Standards, and will guide the Pilot and Field Tests, score reporting, standard setting, and ongoing research.

Data gathered through Pilot and Field testing and ongoing simulation studies will inform updates to the blueprints, including setting the weights each content area contributes to the overall composite test score. Governing States may update [the blueprints](#) after analysis of pilot and field testing. A final version will be adopted by Governing States prior to full implementation in the 2014-15 school year.

TECHNOLOGY STRATEGY FRAMEWORK AND SYSTEM REQUIREMENTS SPECIFICATIONS AVAILABLE



In December, Smarter Balanced released the [Technology Strategy Framework and System Requirements Specifications](#), providing comprehensive IT guidelines to help schools in member states prepare for the Smarter Balanced assessments.

The framework provides minimum hardware specifications and basic bandwidth calculations that will allow schools and districts to evaluate which of their existing devices will support the administration of the next-generation assessments, as well as guidelines for new purchases.

According to Consortium research and data analysis, a majority of schools and districts in member states will be able to administer the assessments with their existing infrastructure.

In addition to the hardware and bandwidth requirements, eligible devices must also have a 10" class screen, a mechanical keyboard, headphones, wired or wireless Internet access, and administrative tools to temporarily disable features, functionalities, and applications that could present a security risk during test administration. The technology specifications apply only to the Smarter Balanced assessments and should not be considered minimum specifications to support instruction, which may require additional technology.

The framework was developed with input and feedback from Smarter Balanced member states, work groups, and data from the Technology Readiness Tool, an online inventory of technology resources launched earlier this year.

The Smarter Balanced Technology Strategy Framework and Systems Requirements Specifications report, summary, Q&A, and informational infographic can be accessed on the [Technology page](#) of our website. In addition, an online bandwidth checker tool allows schools to measure current bandwidth capacity and estimate the number of students that can be tested at one time.

work of the assessment consortia to date and describes the academic rigor required by the emerging assessments. It concludes that "if initial intentions are realized, consortia assessments will address much deeper levels of knowledge, application, communication, and problem solving than do current state assessments."

MATH TRANSLATION WEBINAR PRESENTATION AVAILABLE

Smarter Balanced Director of Support for Under-represented Students Dr. Magda Chia presented a webinar to higher education faculty about the selective use of foreign language translation in the summative assessment for mathematics. Download the slide presentation [here](#).

MATH SAMPLE ITEMS WEBINAR AVAILABLE

The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) hosted a webinar on the released sample assessment items and performance tasks with middle school math teacher Jim Mamer, a recipient of the 2012 Ohio Council of Teachers of Mathematics Elementary Mathematics Teaching Award. Download the presentation slides and view a recording on the CCSSO website [here](#).

REPORTING SYSTEM UPDATE

The Consortium is making progress on developing a robust reporting system for the summative and interim assessments. In December, the Smarter Balanced Reporting Work Group released an update on the design of the reporting system that provides some of the concepts and methodology used in developing the system, as well as some preliminary findings. Download a copy of the update at the Smarter Balanced website [here](#).

CHARLIE LENTH RE-ELECTED TO EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

The Higher Education State Leads re-elected Charles Lenth, Ph.D., to the Consortium's Executive Committee. Lenth is vice president for Policy Analysis and Academic Affairs at the State Higher Education Executive Officers Association (SHEEO). He is one of two higher education representatives on the nine-member board. Read the full press release [here](#).

DIRECTOR OF PROFESSIONAL LEARNING ANNOUNCED

Smarter Balanced named Chrystyna V. Mursky, Ph.D., director of professional learning. Mursky will collaborate with work groups, content leads, and partners to implement the [Formative Assessment Master Work Plan](#), which includes the development of a digital library of formative assessment strategies and practices that enhance day-to-day classroom instruction, as well as online resources to help educators interpret Smarter Balanced interim and summative score reports. Read the full announcement [here](#).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION

How did Smarter Balanced determine the minimum technology specifications?

The Technology Approach Work Group collaborated with member states, as well as Navigation North, American Institutes for Research, Measured Progress, and Pearson to analyze the memory and processor load that the test delivery engine will require; the bandwidth necessary to transmit stimulus materials and items to students; and the data submitted by Smarter Balanced schools and districts through the Technology Readiness Tool. These analyses

identified the minimum technology necessary to assess the full depth and breadth of the Common Core State Standards in a next-generation assessment.

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