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JULY/AUGUST 2013

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Smarter News



FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



As students and teachers return to the classroom over the next few weeks, schools are moving forward with implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). The 2013-14 school year will bring major milestones for Smarter Balanced, including the launch of the Field Test in the spring. By this time next year,

we will be preparing for the launch of the assessment system.

To help schools get ready, Smarter Balanced released [online Practice Tests](#) in grades 3-8 and 11 in English language arts/literacy and mathematics in May. The Practice Tests provide an important opportunity for 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.

Over the summer, a number of enhancements were made to the Practice Tests, including the availability of additional test forms for special populations, mathematics performance tasks, downloadable [scoring guides](#), and a help desk to support teachers and other users. Details about these enhancements are available [below](#).

As schools prepare for new assessments aligned to the Common Core, it is important to remember that students will be tested against newer, more rigorous standards—and a change in scores does not mean our students know less than they did the year before. Rather, it means we have a new beginning and a new set of goals against which to start measuring progress.

Smarter Balanced is committed to working with states to provide tools and resources to teachers to help students succeed. Learn more [below](#) about our work to engage teachers in the development of formative assessment strategies. You can keep up with our work by following Smarter Balanced on [Twitter](#).

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SMARTER BALANCED ASSESSMENT CONSORTIUM

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INSIDE THE STATE-LED CONSORTIUM



The Consortium's Governing States have formed State Leadership Teams (SLTs) and State Networks of Educators (SNEs). These networks— involving nearly 1,800 educators—will help develop

the Consortium's Digital Library, an online collection of formative assessment tools and professional learning resources unique to the Smarter Balanced Assessment System.

Each SLT is made up of 8-12 K-12 educators and higher education faculty in positions of state leadership. They have expertise in the Common Core State Standards, formative assessment practices, curriculum and instruction, English language learners, students with disabilities, students with gifts and talents, and adult online learning. These teams will build capacity in member states by training and supporting the SNEs to contribute to the Digital Library. They will also provide feedback on the online application for the library.

Earlier this year, SLTs recruited K-12 educators and higher education faculty with diverse expertise and backgrounds—including CCSS for Mathematics, CCSS for ELA/literacy, science, social studies, general education, gifted and talented, English language learners, and students with disabilities—to serve on the SNEs.

Over the next year, members of each state's SNE will participate in a series of training sessions. The first will introduce the Quality Criteria designed by the Formative Assessment Advisory Panel. The Quality Criteria will help ensure that the Digital Library includes only the highest-quality resources and that they reflect the intent of the CCSS and the Smarter Balanced vision of effective formative assessment practices. SNEs will use these criteria to submit and review resources. Additional information about the Quality Criteria for the Digital Library is available in a [recorded webinar](#).

The Digital Library will be open for all registered educators in Governing States in April 2014.

SUPPORTING CLASSROOM TEACHERS

Recognizing the need for example assessment items that teachers can use for professional learning, Smarter Balanced developed online Practice Tests for grades 3–8 and 11 in English language arts/literacy (ELA/literacy) and mathematics. The Practice Tests are available through the

for Under-Represented Students

Shelbi Cole, Ph.D. - Director,

Mathematics

Dacia Hopfensperger - Director, State Services

Jacqueline E. King, Ph.D. - Director,

Higher Education Collaboration

Marty McCall, Ph.D. - Lead

Psychometrician

Chrystyna V. Mursky, Ph.D. - Director,

Professional Learning

Brandt Redd - Chief Technology Officer

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Maine
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Missouri
Montana
North Carolina
North Dakota
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South Carolina
South Dakota
Vermont
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Wisconsin
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Pennsylvania

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U.S. Virgin Islands

IN THE NEWS

- An article in *The Quick & The ED* breaks down the cost of the assessments for member states.
- *EdSource* reported on California's commitment to Smarter Balanced.
- Education officials across the country have confirmed their commitment to the Common Core, as reported by *The Washington*



Smarter Balanced website.

The Practice Tests include test questions with the same features that students will experience in 2014–15, including performance tasks—extended activities that challenge students to apply

their knowledge and skills to respond to real-world problems.

Since the launch of the Practice Tests in May, Smarter Balanced has made a number of enhancements, including [grade-level scoring guides](#) that provide rubrics for each item. In addition, the Consortium has added:

- Special forms for mathematics (Spanish glossary, Braille, and text-to-speech for grades 4, 5, 6, and 8);
- Special forms for English language arts/literacy (ELA/literacy) (Braille and text-to-speech for grades 3, 5, 6, and 8);
- Mathematics performance tasks, including performance tasks for special forms (Spanish glossary, Braille, and text-to-speech);
- Additional items to the ELA/literacy forms and updated scoring guides;
- Availability of the Practice Test for use with Internet Explorer 10 (IE 8 will **not** be supported and IE 9 may be supported at a future date).

Smarter Balanced also launched a toll-free help desk line for the Practice Test. The scheduled days and hours of operation are Monday through Friday 7 a.m. Eastern time to 4 p.m. Hawaii time (excluding holidays). You can call the help desk toll-free at **1-855-833-1969** or email the Consortium at smarterbalancedhelpdesk@ets.org. Associates are trained to handle a variety of inquiries. Questions regarding accessing the Practice Test, Practice Test accommodations, use and purpose of the Practice Test, and technical issues related to taking the Practice Test are welcomed and encouraged.

Learn more about how teachers can use the Practice Tests to prepare for the transition to next-generation assessments aligned to the Common Core from Chrystyna Mursky, Smarter Balanced Director of Professional Learning on [ASCD's InService blog](#).

BUILD YOUR COMMON CORE KNOWLEDGE WITH ASCD'S ONLINE RESOURCES

Guest column by Sherida Britt, director, *Tools for Teachers*,

Post.

- [Education Week](#) described the progress the Consortium is making in developing tools for English language learners and students with disabilities.
- [The Casper-Star Tribune](#) reported on Wyoming's change to Governing State status.
- [ASCD](#) published a blog by Smarter Balanced Director of Professional Learning Chrystyna Mursky on the importance of the Practice Tests for teachers in preparing for the Common Core.
- An article in [The Oregonian](#) discussed the leading role the state plays in developing online assessments.
- [THE Journal](#) provided tips to ensure schools are tech ready for Common Core assessments.
- The [Hartford Courant](#) reported on Connecticut's plans to participate in the Field Test.
- [Education Week](#) detailed North Dakota's decision to become a Smarter Balanced Governing State.
- Idaho teacher Micah Lauer wrote a piece for the [Idaho Statesman](#) explaining how the new assessment system will help students build critical-thinking skills.

TOOL TO EVALUATE LANGUAGE COMPLEXITY OF TEST ITEMS

Smarter Balanced partnered with World-Class Instructional Design and Assessment (WIDA) to help item writers and reviewers examine the language complexity level used in the Consortium's items. WIDA produced a one-page rubric that allows Smarter Balanced to quantify text density, language form and structure, and vocabulary. Smarter Balanced used this rubric in item review during Pilot Test development. The rubric is being used during full item development for the Field Test, including item writing and review. Read more about this tool to evaluate language complexity



ASCD

ASCD, the educational leadership association, is committed to providing educators with support for implementing the Common Core State Standards. The new, higher standards

will require schools and communities to better and more comprehensively support student learning if students are to meet these enhanced expectations.

Along with these enhanced expectations comes a focus on new, high-stakes tests. But how can one be creative in such a high-stakes, standards-driven environment? Taking advantage of the many free online resources that provide lesson plans, articles, and professional learning on topics like English language learners (ELL), Common Core State Standards, differentiation, and formative assessments.

ASCD's EduCore™ tool is a free online resource portal that houses materials intended to build teachers' knowledge around the Common Core standards. Teachers can watch webinars presented by experts in the field on best practices along with supplemental resources that can be used immediately in the field for their own professional development or in professional learning communities. And for secondary teachers, there are instructional resources from the Literacy Design Collaborative and Mathematics Design Collaborative that allow teachers to transform their classrooms by developing student tasks that will challenge and engage their students.

To read more about professional growth aligned with the Common Core State Standards, visit [ASCD's Inservice blog](#).

Sherida Britt is the Director for Tools for Teachers at ASCD. During Britt's tenure as a faculty member at ASCD, she has devised interactive professional development products and materials to instruct educators on topics such as RTI, formative assessment, literacy in content areas, and differentiation. Britt, now the Director for Tools for Teachers at ASCD, coordinates initiatives with the ASCD online production team, subject matter experts, programmers, graphic artists, and multimedia professionals to develop interactive online and multimedia professional development products, tools, and materials.

TOOLS FOR EVALUATING HIGH-QUALITY ASSESSMENTS



The Common Core State Standards set consistent, rigorous learning goals for all students. Yet high-quality standards are just the first step in creating an education system that prepares all students for college and career. Assessments, curriculum, and

instruction must all be aligned to the knowledge and skills embodied

of test items [here](#).

QUALITY CRITERIA FOR THE DIGITAL LIBRARY WEBINAR

Smarter Balanced Director of Professional Learning Chrystyna Mursky hosted a webinar to provide background on the development of the Quality Criteria for the digital library, 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 provided an explanation of 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. View the webinar [here](#).

ACCESSIBILITY AND ACCOMMODATIONS WEBINAR

Smarter Balanced Director of Support for Under-represented Students Magda Chia hosted a webinar detailing the Consortium's work to ensure that the assessment system meets the needs of all students. The presentation to the Council of the Great City Schools includes an update on the accessibility and accommodations policy, translations, and item development with sample assessment questions. You can access the webinar recording [here](#).

CONSORTIUM NOW INCLUDES 23 GOVERNING STATES

North Dakota and Wyoming changed their membership status in the Consortium to Governing States. As Governing States, North Dakota and Wyoming will help shape the design of the assessment system and vote on fiscal and policy decisions. Teachers in both states will also have the opportunity to participate in the development of assessment items and formative assessment

in the standards. Two new reports shed light on what high-quality assessments should offer, and how to properly align assessment materials to the Common Core.

The *Criteria for High-Quality Assessment* report, published jointly by the Stanford Center for Opportunity in Education (SCOPE), the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST), and the Learning Sciences Research Institute, answers the question of what a high-quality assessment should include.

Researchers identified five criteria for a high-quality assessment system:

- Higher-order cognitive skills to give students the ability to use what they've learned for new situations and problems;
- An assessment of students' critical abilities such as multimedia communication and research skills;
- Internationally benchmarked assessments that can be evaluated against other leading countries;
- Assessments designed so underlying concepts can be taught and learned, rather than depending on test-taking skills; and
- Ensuring that assessments are valid, reliable, and fair.

You can read more about the findings by downloading the [brief](#) or reading the [full report](#).

Another resource for teachers and administrators is the *Toolkit for Evaluating Alignment of Instructional and Assessment Materials to the Common Core State Standards*, released by Student Achievement Partners, the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO), and Achieve.

Resources in the toolkit are based on the *Publishers' Criteria for the Common Core State Standards*. They include tools to evaluate ELA/literacy and mathematics curricula, lesson plans, and assessment items and reading passages. You can [download the toolkit here](#).

Learn more about the development of the Smarter Balanced Assessment System on our [website](#).

RESEARCH DEMONSTRATES VALUE OF NEXT-GENERATION ASSESSMENTS



Smarter Balanced recently released preliminary cost estimates for the assessment system. For most member states, the full suite of formative, interim, and summative assessments is expected to cost less than they currently pay.

Of course, next-generation, online assessments will be quite

resources. A full list of members is available [here](#).

EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE WELCOMES JUAN D'BROT

Governing States elected Juan D'Brot of West Virginia to the Executive Committee. D'Brot is Executive Director of Assessment, Accountability, and Research for the West Virginia Department of Education. He fills the remainder of the term vacated by Dan Hupp who recently retired from the Maine Department of Education. Read more about Juan D'Brot [here](#).

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTION

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.

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different from many of today's state-wide tests. The Smarter Balanced Assessment System is designed to measure higher-order skills that are essential to the Common Core. In addition, Smarter Balanced will offer aligned formative tools and interim assessments, which many school districts procure separately today.

While these differences complicate direct cost comparisons, several reports provide much-needed context for the costs and benefits of next-generation assessments. A report by the Brookings Institute on state-level costs of assessment systems suggests that states are better off collaborating with an assessment consortium to produce their state's assessment.

"For example, a state with 100,000 students that joins a consortium of states containing one million students is predicted to save 37 percent, or \$1.4 million per year; a state of 500,000 students saves an estimated 25 percent, or \$3.9 million, by joining the same consortium."

--*Strength in Numbers: State Spending on K-12 Assessment*. By Matthew M. Chingos, The Brookings Institute. November 12, 2012.

Research from the [Stanford Center for Opportunity in Education \(SCOPE\)](#) suggests that high-quality assessments that require students to analyze, critique, evaluate, and apply knowledge can better measure college and career readiness. While these types of assessments are more expensive, online delivery and efficient scoring methods, two key components of the Smarter Balanced Assessment System, can reduce costs. After crunching the numbers, researchers concluded that current spending on assessments could support the development of high-quality assessment systems.

"A more unified system of higher-quality assessments, combining state and district spending, could result in significant additional dollars that could be made available for an integrated system of higher-quality assessments or other educational uses."

--*Getting to Higher-Quality Assessments: Evaluation Costs, Benefits, and Investment Strategies*. By Barry Topol, John Olson, Ed Roeber. Stanford Center for Opportunity Policy in Education. March 18, 2013.

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