**National Forum on Education Statistics**

Summer 2012 Forum Meeting

Tuesday, July 10, 2012

Smarter Balanced has developed the following responses to questions submitted by Forum members.

**General Planning**

**What guidance are you providing to assessment heads in states who are working on this but not bringing other state representatives (e.g. data/technology staff) into the planning?**

Each state is responsible for developing a transition plan for the new assessment system. Smarter Balanced has developed a transparent, state-led governance model to facilitate engagement of key stakeholders. Each member state has a state lead who coordinates with the state chief or commissioner and shares information with agency staff. In addition, the 10 Smarter Balanced state-led work groups involve state agency staff with a variety of backgrounds. Each state has also appointed a higher education lead to engage institutions of higher education and faculty. More information on state leads and higher education leads is available at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/about/member-states/>.   
  
Through the Technology Readiness Tool initiative, each state has appointed a State Readiness Coordinator—an individual or team that supports LEAs and will lead planning for the transition to online assessments. States have also designated Teacher Involvement Coordinators to lead outreach to educators.

**When will the roll out plan be available? SEAs and LEAs would benefit from knowing the implementation timeline because it is difficult to plan without knowing what is expected and when, especially with regard to budget cycles.**

Smarter Balanced will deliver a fully functional assessment system that will be ready for implementation in the 2014-15 school year. Key milestones include:

* Feb/March 2013—Pilot Test in a representative sample of classrooms.
* Spring 2014—Broad Field Test of the assessment system.

Additional information is available on the Smarter Balanced website at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/timeline/>.

Smarter Balanced has created a Sustainability Task Force that will develop recommendations about how states will procure, administer, and maintain the Smarter Balanced assessment system after the federal grant ends in 2014. State leads will continue to be informed as that work progresses.

Finally, the Consortium has developed new hardware purchasing guidelines (<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/SmarterBalanced_NewHardwareGuidelines.pdf>) to provide guidance for schools and districts making instructional technology purchases over the next two years. Comprehensive minimum technology requirements for legacy systems are expected to be available in late summer 2012.

**Will stress testing or other technology readiness tools become available? If so, when and where?**

The Technology Readiness Tool, a joint effort between Smarter Balanced and PARCC, began this year, with the first data collection window available from March 19 through June 30, 2012. Subsequent data collections will occur in the fall and spring through 2014. Readiness reports will be available to states this summer.

In addition, Smarter Balanced will stress test the test delivery system against the hardware and bandwidth specifications deemed necessary to support the assessment.

**How will the work of the consortia be evaluated?**

A research and evaluation plan is included in the Consortium’s Race to the Top Assessment Program proposal: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Smarter-Balanced-RttT-Application.pdf> (pages 88-109). Additionally, Smarter Balanced assessments will be subject to federal peer review, as is the case with NCLB assessments.

**How will the consortia receive feedback from participants (e.g., SEAs, LEAs, and schools)?**

Smarter Balanced receives feedback through K-12 and higher education state leads, as well as the participants in 10 state-led work groups that collaborate on the development of the assessment system. More information about the governance of the Consortium is available at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/about/governance/>. In addition, the Pilot and Field Tests of the assessments will allow educators and schools to provide feedback on the assessment items and the testing system.

**How are the consortia planning to sustain this work after the contract/funding expires?**

As mentioned above, Smarter Balanced has created a Sustainability Task Force that will develop recommendations about how states will procure, administer, and maintain the Smarter Balanced assessment system after the federal grant ends in 2014.

**Data Issues**

**Who owns the assessment results/data?**

Assessment data will continue to be owned in a manner consistent with FERPA.

**Will LEAs have to upload a database of students? If so, how will it work and how will mobile students be included?**

It is expected that states will submit and receive data from the assessment system, which may exchange data with local Student Information Systems (SIS) in order to determine student data and accessibility profile information. Additional details about test administration will be developed in collaboration with the contractor for RFP-11 Test Delivery System, which is expected to be awarded this summer.

**When will information on data structures become available?**

Decisions about file formats will be made by the Consortium in collaboration with the contractor for RFP-15 Reporting System, which will be awarded later this summer. Additional information is expected to be available in early 2013.

**What data will be returned to an LEA?**

Each student will receive a scale score on a vertical scale and an achievement level category. Sub-scores will also be available at the student level. More detailed reports will be provided for classrooms, schools, and districts. For example, on the writing claim, we probably will not report sub-scores within writing—such as organization or style—at the student level, but it will be possible to do so across a larger number of students at classroom or school level.

**How will results reports be organized?**

In April 2012, Smarter Balanced released RFP-15 Report System Development. The contract is expected to be awarded this summer. The contractor will develop the reporting design and functional requirements to support a system portal and differentiated reports for teachers, students, parents, administrators, and other stakeholders.

**How will data be reported to EDEN?**

States will continue to report their own student accountability information to EDEN. The student reporting requirements for achievement will be consistent across the consortium.

**How will the potential gap year between the old and new assessments affect growth models?**

Each state must evaluate the impact of the transition to Smarter Balanced assessments consistent with its accountability policies. As part of the sustainability plan, the Consortium will develop strategies to assist states with bridge studies.

**How will scores on SBAC and PARCC tests compare? How are the models going to be integrated?**

Smarter Balanced is collaborating with the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) to ensure that there is comparability across the two assessments at the proficiency cut score for every grade. Both consortia will jointly engage with technical and policy advisors to study cross-consortia comparability.

**Cut scores for college and career readiness vary by state and institution—how will this be handled?**

As part of the Race to the Top Assessment Program application, Smarter Balanced secured commitments from institutions of higher education to work toward the goal of establishing a common proficiency standard that would allow students to enroll in credit-bearing courses.

As part of our ongoing commitment to engaging the higher education field, each state has established a higher education lead. Higher education state leads are encouraging college and university faculty to play a very active role in establishing college- and career-ready standards for the 11th grade assessment. In addition to expert judgment from K-12 teachers and higher education faculty, Smarter Balanced will draw upon multiple sources of empirical data to guide the setting of performance standards, including: international and national benchmarks such as PISA, TIMSS, NAEP, SAT and ACT; and information about student performance in high school and subsequent postsecondary success from state-level longitudinal data systems. A contract for preliminary achievement level descriptors will begin this summer.

Finally, two members of the Smarter Balanced Executive Committee represent higher education, helping to ensure open lines of communication as the assessment system is developed.

**Are there resources to help states/districts interpret results?**

Smarter Balanced will develop web-based professional learning tools for LEAs, schools, and stakeholders to understand how to access and interpret Smarter Balanced interim and summative score reports. Additional information is available in the Formative Assessment Master Work Plan: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Formative-Assessment-Master-Work-Plan-Narrative.pdf>.  
  
As part of this work, Smarter Balanced will convene State Leadership Teams charged with recruiting an average of 100 educators per state to form State Networks of Educators. These educator networks will provide feedback on the development of formative assessment resources and professional learning tools. They will also serve as ambassadors to help states engage stakeholders with resources and trainings to understand and interpret assessment results.

**Will interoperability specifications become available? If so, when and where?**

The Smarter Balanced Architecture Review Board (ARB) will establish a process by which SEAs may use approved alternative systems in place of one or many Smarter Balanced developed components. Additional information about the ARB is available at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/technology/>.

**Assessment Technology**

**What metrics for technology demand are available? What about for broadband, wireless, and mobile accessibility? How many testing stations must be available simultaneously?**

Bandwidth specifications will be developed as part of the Consortium’s minimum technology requirements, which are expected to be released in late summer 2012. Bandwidth requirements will be informed by RFP-11 Test Delivery System, which is expected to be awarded this summer.

**What costs are estimated for technology upgrades and implementation? Is funding available?**

The Technology Readiness Tool will help states identify infrastructure gaps and plan for the transition to Smarter Balanced assessments. In addition, Smarter Balanced will make available a paper-and-pencil option for up to three years after implementation.

**What information is available regarding online testing software and platforms?**

Decisions about the online testing software and platforms will be made by the Consortium in collaboration with the contractor for RFP-11/18/20 Test Engine Development, which is expected to be awarded this summer.

**Will the size or specifications of a student’s monitor possibly influence performance?**

The new hardware purchasing guidelines specify a minimum screen size of 9.5 inches (10 inch class) with a resolution of 1024 x 768. In addition, Smarter Balanced will evaluate whether external keyboards are necessary for tablets (since the on-screen keyboard significantly reduces the area available for test information). All hardware choices should consider the individual needs of students. Some students may need hardware that exceeds these minimum guidelines, and some students may require qualitatively different hardware. For example, some students with limited visual acuity and other special visual needs may require larger screens.

**What is the plan for mobile device support?**

Smarter Balanced has developed new hardware purchasing guidelines (<http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/SmarterBalanced_NewHardwareGuidelines.pdf>) to provide guidance for schools and districts making instructional technology purchases over the next two years. The 2nd and 3rd generation iPad as well as other tablet options will be eligible devices.

**How will mobile testers be authenticated?**

Authentication procedures will be developed by the Consortium in collaboration with the contractor for RFP 19-Test Administration, which is expected to be awarded this summer.

**What does the technology readiness tool actually do?**

Use of the tool will allow local schools to capture and report key readiness indicators, including: number and type of computers; local network and bandwidth infrastructure; and local staff resources and other information needed to evaluate overall technology readiness for the coming transition to digital delivery of assessments. This information will guide Smarter Balanced in the development of the assessment system and help policymakers address educational technology gaps.

**Instructional Issues**

**How will instructional practices and curricula be altered to align with new standards and assessments?**

Smarter Balanced is guided by the belief that a balanced, high-quality assessment system can improve teaching and learning by providing information and tools for teachers and schools to help students succeed. Timely and meaningful assessment information can offer specific information about areas of performance so that teachers can follow up with targeted instruction, students can better target their own efforts, and administrators and policymakers can more fully understand what students know and can do, in order to guide curriculum and professional development decisions. The Smarter Balanced Theory of Action articulates this vision and is available at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Smarter-Balanced-Theory-of-Action.pdf>.

In addition, states participating in the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium will have access to professional development materials and instructional resources for teachers through a digital library. These tools are optional and can be used, as needed, to complement state curriculum supports to districts and teachers.

**How will Common Core State Standards be incorporated into the assessments?**

Smarter Balanced is developing a system of assessments that measures the full depth and breadth of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). To achieve this goal, Smarter Balanced developed content specifications in English language arts/literacy and mathematics to ensure that the assessments cover the range of knowledge and skills in the CCSS. The content specifications establish claims— evidence-based statements about what students know and can do as demonstrated by their performance on the assessment—and assessment targets aligned to the CCSS. The content specifications are available at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/>.

**To what extent are assessments going to include 21st Century skills?**

The Smarter Balanced assessment system will measure the full depth and breadth of the Common Core State Standards in ELA/literacy and mathematics. The authors of the Common Core explicitly focused on the cognitive skills and knowledge that students need to be ready to succeed in entry-level, credit-bearing, academic college courses and in workforce training programs. Critical-thinking, problem-solving, and communication skills are a major focus in the standards. Through innovative items and performance tasks, Smarter Balanced will measure these important skills.  
  
However, the Common Core authors also note that the standards are not meant to encompass everything a student should learn, or describe all of the skills that students need in the 21st Century. Indeed, academic readiness—as defined by the Common Core—is only part of a more comprehensive set of knowledge and skills that contribute to college and career readiness, such as work habits, persistence, and postsecondary planning.

**How do you anticipate teachers will be able to use data that are reported back to LEAs?**

Teachers will have access to a secure, online reporting system that provides assessment results showing student achievement and progress toward mastery of the Common Core State Standards.   
  
In addition to results from the summative assessment, the reporting system will include results from optional interim assessments. These interim assessments will allow teachers, schools, or districts to design their own test blueprint—with results reported on the same scale as the summative assessment. Interim assessment items and tasks are non-secure and can be used for the purpose of evaluating student performance and curriculum alignment.   
  
Finally, the digital portal used to deliver the reporting system will also include a digital library of formative assessment practices and research-based instructional tools to help teachers address learning challenges and differentiate instruction.

**What content will be assessed, if any, beyond the two subject areas?**

There are no plans to include additional subjects into the assessment system by implementation in the 2014-15 school year. However, a number of states are working to develop consistent, next-generation science standards by the end of 2012. It is likely that the online test delivery options selected by states (or by the Consortium) will support the delivery of online science assessments in the future—particularly in cases where the science assessments include selected response items.

**What are the plans for the professional development of staff at SEAs and LEAs?**

Smarter Balanced will develop web-based assessment literacy professional learning materials and supplemental assessment resources. Trainings will be held with State Leadership Teams and State Networks of Educators of approximately 100 teachers per state. These resources can be used by states to conduct professional development at the LEA level. Additional information is available in the Formative Assessment Master Work Plan: <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/03/Formative-Assessment-Master-Work-Plan-Narrative.pdf>.

**Implementation**

**Will a prototype of the assessment be made available prior to full-scale implementation?**

In 2013, a Pilot Test will be conducted in a sample of school districts to ensure technical adequacy and fairness of items and tasks to all student populations. A larger scale Field Test will follow in early 2014. The sampling plan for the Pilot Test will be developed in collaboration with member states, and more information will be available later this year. Additionally, in the 2013-14 school year, a prototype of the test delivery engine will be available for states to use and stress test.

**What accommodations are available for computer-adaptive tests? Can accommodations be administered to a group of students? (Note: Considerable LEA time is spent planning for ELL and IEP student accommodations.)**

The Smarter Balanced assessment system will provide accurate measures of achievement and growth toward college and career readiness for students with disabilities and English language learners. Smarter Balanced is developing a common framework to guide policy recommendations about accommodation options that can be provided to groups of students and individuals based on documented needs. One advantage of online testing is that many accommodations can be delivered to a student individually—without requiring a separate grouping and administration of the assessment.

**Will testing occur simultaneously or will there be a window of time for tests to occur? Given that testing windows may occur, how will you deal with the fact that some students taking the tests will have received more days of instruction than others?**

The summative assessment will be administered during a 12-week window at the end of the school year. This administration window is designed to allow states and school districts flexibility to ensure that all students have access to the technology resources required to administer the assessment. Smarter Balanced will continue to evaluate the impact of the summative assessment administration window on student scores during the Pilot Test (early 2013) and the Field Test (early 2014) to determine if adjustments in scoring or administration are necessary. There will be no fixed window for the optional computer adaptive interim assessments, which can be administered at locally determined intervals.

**What staff will be needed to plan for and implement the assessments? Will the time needed by teachers to administer the tests go up or down?**

Smarter Balanced is working with member states to develop the test blueprint, which will inform the total length of the assessment. The length of year-end assessments varies among states today. It is worth noting that Smarter Balanced will include performance tasks in both ELA/literacy and mathematics. These performance tasks will challenge students to apply their knowledge and skills to respond to real-world problems and may take one to two class periods to complete.