

# RACE TO THE TOP ASSESSMENT

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

Year Two Report

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U.S. Department of Education  
Washington, DC 20202

May 2013

**U.S. Department of Education**

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## ***Introduction***

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### ABOUT THE RACE TO THE TOP ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

The Race to the Top Assessment program was authorized as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA). In September 2010, the U.S. Department of Education (Department) awarded competitive, four-year grants to two consortia of states, the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC) and the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced).<sup>1</sup>

The two consortia are developing comprehensive assessment systems tied to common academic content standards that are valid, support and inform instruction, provide accurate information about what students know and can do, and measure student achievement against standards, including those that are typically hard to measure, designed to ensure that all students gain the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in college and the workplace. The assessment systems must include one or more summative assessment components in mathematics and in English language arts that are administered at least once during the academic year in grades 3 through 8 and at least once in high school; both consortia are also creating a series of diagnostic, formative, or interim tests that will be available for their member states to provide on-going feedback during the school year to inform teaching and learning. The assessments must include all students, including English learners and students with disabilities. PARCC and Smarter Balanced will each develop a common measure for use by their member states whether individual students are college- and career-ready or on track to being college- and career-ready. The assessment systems will provide an accurate measure of student achievement, particularly for very high- and low-achieving students, and an accurate measure of student growth over a full academic year or course.

These assessment systems, which will be operational in the 2014-2015 school year, are intended to play a critical support role in educational systems; provide administrators, educators, parents, and students with the data and information needed to continuously improve teaching and learning; and help meet the President's goal of restoring, by 2020, the nation's position as the world leader in college graduates.

### RACE TO THE TOP ASSESSMENT PROGRAM REVIEW

As part of the Department's commitment to supporting states as they implement ambitious reform, the Department established the Implementation and Support Unit (ISU) in the Office of the Deputy Secretary to administer, among others, the Race to the Top Assessment program. The goal of the ISU is to provide collaborative support to grantees as they implement unprecedented and comprehensive reforms to improve student outcomes. By building true partnerships with grantees, the ISU moves beyond a compliance-based monitoring structure while maintaining high expectations for results.

Consistent with this goal, the Department has developed a Race to the Top Assessment program review process that not only addresses the Department's responsibilities for fiscal and programmatic oversight, but is designed to identify areas in which the consortia need assistance and support to meet their goals. The ISU works with the Race to the Top Assessment consortia to identify and provide support based on their specific plans and needs. ISU staff encourages collaboration and partnership across the consortia and with outside experts to achieve and sustain educational reforms that improve student outcomes.

The consortia are accountable for implementing their approved Race to the Top Assessment plans. The program review is a continuous improvement process.<sup>2</sup> Regular updates and data from the consortium inform the Department's support for the consortia. In the event that adjustments are required to an

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<sup>1</sup> More information about the Race to the Top Assessment program is available at [www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment](http://www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment).

<sup>2</sup> More information about the ISU's Race to the Top Assessment program review process can be found at: [www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/review-guide.pdf](http://www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/review-guide.pdf).

approved plan, the consortium must submit a formal amendment request to the Department for consideration. The consortia may submit for Department approval amendment requests to a plan and budget provided that such changes do not significantly affect the scope or objectives of the approved plans. The consortia's approved plans, including any approved amendments, can be found at: [www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/awards.html](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/awards.html).

If the Department determines that the consortium is not meeting its goals, activities, timelines, budget, or annual targets or is not fulfilling other applicable requirements, the Department will take appropriate enforcement action(s), consistent with 34 CFR § 80.43 in the Education Department General Administrative Regulations (EDGAR).

#### ABOUT THIS REPORT

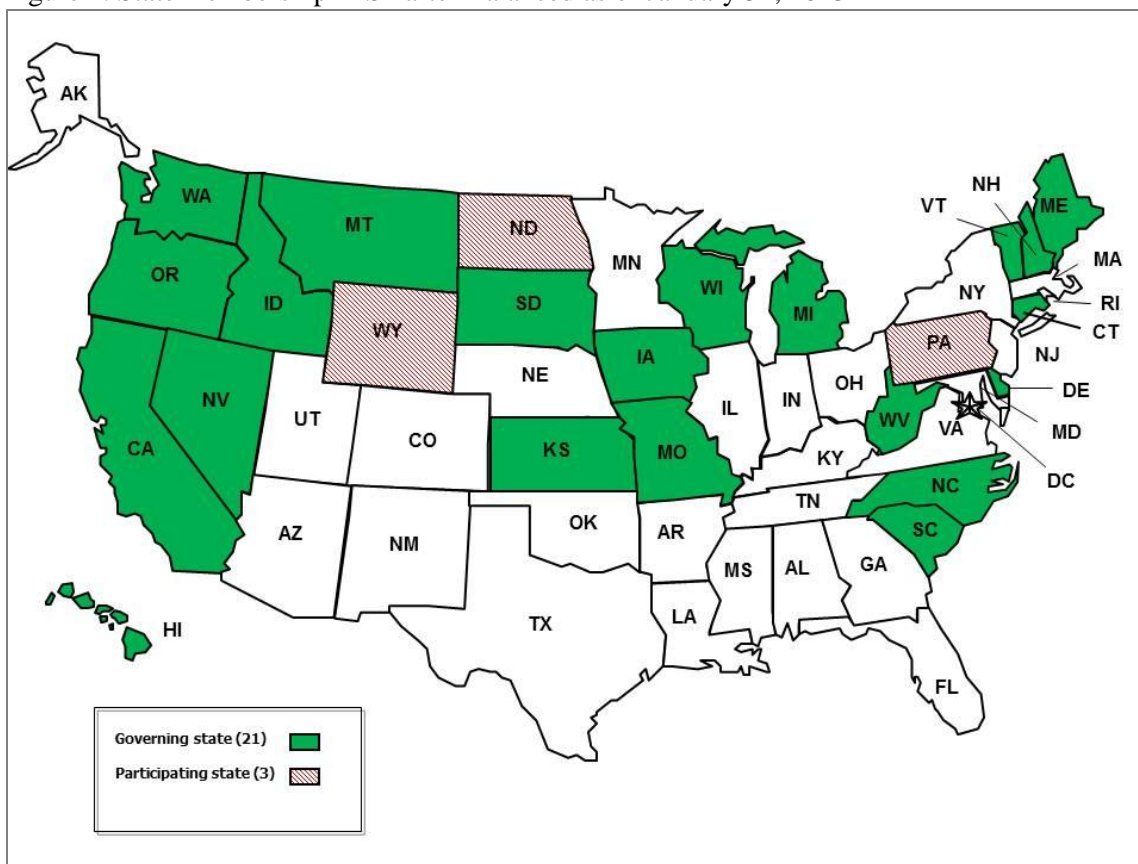
This report on the consortium's year two implementation of the Race to the Top Assessment program is focused on the four primary components of the consortium's activities: governance; assessment design and development; professional capacity, outreach, and communications; and technology. The Department used the information gathered during the program review process (e.g., through monthly calls, an on-site visit conducted in August 2012, the consortium's annual performance report (APR) which was submitted in August 2012, and conversations with staff in four Smarter Balanced member states in fall 2012) to draft the report.

This report serves as an assessment of the consortium's overall implementation of its approved plan, highlighting successes and accomplishments, identifying challenges, and noting important lessons learned during the second year and key upcoming activities. It covers the period from September 2011 through the end of December 2012, except in a few instances where more recent information is explicitly noted.

## *About the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium*

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced) consists of 24 states (see figure 1). Twenty-one are governing states, meaning they are involved in policy decision-making for the consortium and are committed to using the Smarter Balanced assessment system when it is operational. Three others are advisory states, meaning they may be involved in the work of both Smarter Balanced and the other consortium, PARCC, but have not committed to using either assessment system. Awarded a grant in the amount of \$175,649,539 by the Department in September 2010, Smarter Balanced selected Washington to serve as its fiscal agent. The consortium has contracted with WestEd as its project management partner.

Figure 1. State membership in Smarter Balanced as of January 31, 2013



At the end of year one, Smarter Balanced consisted of 21 governing and 6 advisory states. As a result of changes that occurred within the consortium’s state memberships during year two, Smarter Balanced now consists of 21 governing and 3 advisory states. South Carolina shifted from an advisory to a governing state. Two other advisory states, Alabama and Colorado, left the consortium along with one governing state, Utah.

In July, Smarter Balanced amended its governance document to include an “affiliate” member status. This revision provides an opportunity for education entities other than states, such as a U.S. territory or commonwealth, to be involved in the work of Smarter Balanced at their own expense (only the 50 States, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico are eligible to be governing or advisory states per the requirements of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act). As of the end of January 2013, the consortium has no affiliate members.

### THEORY OF ACTION

The Smarter Balanced application included a theory of action based on several principles of assessment systems in high-achieving nations and states (p. 32-33 of the consortium’s application, available at [www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/rta2010smarterbalanced.pdf](http://www2.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop-assessment/rta2010smarterbalanced.pdf)):

1. Assessments are grounded in a thoughtful, standards-based curriculum and are managed as part of an integrated system of standards, curriculum, assessment, instruction, and teacher development. Curriculum and assessments are organized around a well-defined set of learning progressions along multiple dimensions within subject areas. Formative and interim/benchmark assessments and instructional supports are conceptualized in tandem with summative assessments—all of them linked to the standards and supported by a unified technology platform.
2. Assessments produce evidence of student performance on challenging tasks that evaluate the Common Core State Standards (CCSS). Instruction and assessments seek to teach and evaluate knowledge and skills that generalize and can transfer to higher education and multiple work domains. They emphasize deep knowledge of core concepts and ideas within and across the disciplines—along with analysis, synthesis, problem solving, communication, and critical thinking—thereby requiring a focus on complex performances as well as on specific concepts, facts, and skills.
3. Teachers are integrally involved in the development and scoring of assessments. While many assessment components are efficiently scored with computer assistance, teachers must also be involved in the formative and summative assessment systems so that they deeply understand and can teach in a manner that is consistent with the full intent of the standards, while becoming more skilled in their own assessment practices.
4. The development and implementation of the assessment system is a state-led effort with a transparent and inclusive governance structure. Starting in December 2009, prior to being awarded an RTTA grant, Smarter Balanced has hosted weekly conference calls and several face-to-face meetings open to all states interested in establishing a consortium of states for the development of assessments aligned to the CCSS. Those activities have resulted in a governance structure that has established a consensus decision-making model and clear leadership roles. Each state’s commitment to the collaborative process and products will facilitate the development of a complex system and signal ongoing support for its implementation.
5. Assessments are structured to continuously improve teaching and learning. Assessment as, of, and for learning is designed to develop understanding of what learning standards are, what high-quality work looks like, what growth is occurring, and what is needed for student learning.
6. Assessment, reporting, and accountability systems provide useful information on multiple measures that is educative for all stakeholders. Reporting of assessment results is timely and meaningful—offering 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.
7. Design and implementation strategies adhere to established professional standards. The development of an integrated, balanced assessment system is an enormous undertaking, requiring commitment to established quality standards in order for the system to be credible, fair, and technically sound.

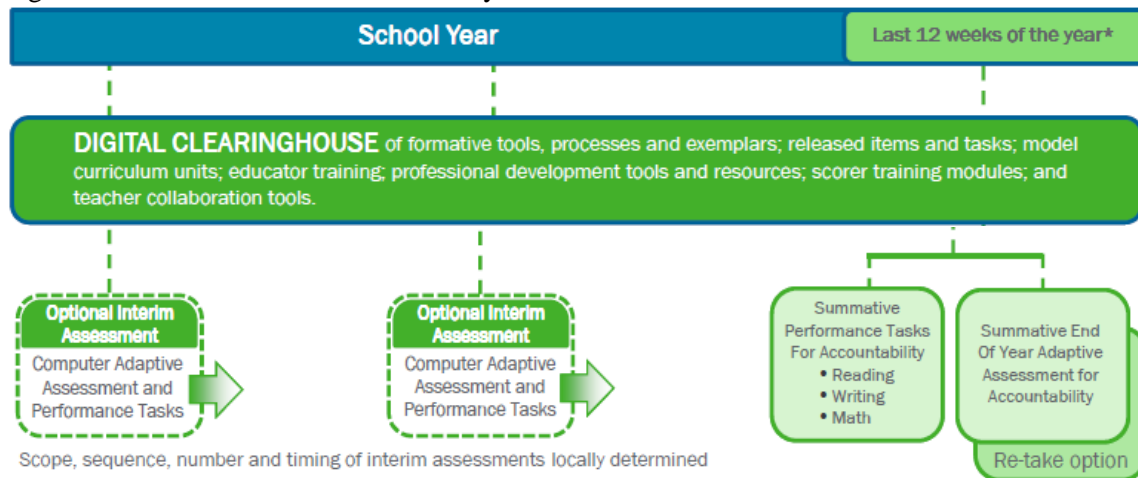
### ASSESSMENT SYSTEM DESIGN

As Smarter Balanced described in its application, it will develop an assessment system that “promotes research-supported instructional practice and incorporates a balanced set of technology-supported tools, innovative assessments, and state-of-the-art classroom support mechanisms that work coherently to support teaching and learning” (p. 6 of the application). The assessment system will be comprised of formative, interim, and summative components.

Figure 2 details the primary components of the assessment system. Specifically, as noted in the application, Smarter Balanced proposes to implement a system that features the following (p. 5-6):

- CCSS-based computer-adaptive summative assessments that make use of technology-enhanced item types and teacher-developed and scored performance events;
- Computer-adaptive interim/benchmark assessments – reflecting learning progressions or content clusters – that provide more in-depth and/or mid-course information about what students know and can do in relation to the CCSS;
- Research-supported instructionally sensitive tools, processes, and practices developed by state educators that can be used formatively at the classroom level to improve teaching and learning;
- Focused on-going support to teachers through professional development opportunities and exemplary instructional materials linked to the CCSS;
- Online reporting and tracking system that enables access to key types of information about student progress toward college- and career-readiness and about specific strengths and limitations in what students know and are able to do at each grade level; and
- Cross-state communications network to inform stakeholders about Smarter Balanced activities and ensure a common focus on the goal of college- and career-readiness for all students.

Figure 2. Smarter Balanced assessment system



\* Time windows may be adjusted based on results from the research agenda and final implementation decisions.  
 Source: [www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Smarter-Balanced-Overview-Presentation.pdf](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Smarter-Balanced-Overview-Presentation.pdf).

Smarter Balanced will develop summative assessments for each of grades 3 through 11. Assessments in grades 9 and 10 will be optional for states. The Smarter Balanced summative assessments will consist of:

- Performance tasks that require student-initiated planning, management of information and ideas, interaction with other materials or people, and production of more extended responses (p. 53 of the application).
- Computer-adaptive assessment that selects items for a student based on the student’s responses to previous questions, thus adapting to the student’s demonstrated ability throughout the test. This component will include selected response, constructed response, and technology-enhanced constructed response items. It will be administered during the last 12 weeks of the school year. Students will have an opportunity to re-take this component if necessary.

The assessment system is expected to be computer-administered. Smarter Balanced anticipates a three-year phase-in period (until the 2017-2018 school year) during which school districts may administer a



comparable paper-and-pencil version of the summative assessment. The mathematics assessment will be translated into five languages.

Smarter Balanced will also create optional, computer-adaptive interim assessments in each of grades 3-11. States, districts, schools, and teachers will have discretion over when these assessments can be administered during the school year. They will include the same range of test item types as the summative assessment. Finally, the system will include a set of formative tools, processes, and practices which will be available through a digital library to teachers for use on a daily basis to support their instruction.

More information about Smarter Balanced can be found at: [www.smarterbalanced.org](http://www.smarterbalanced.org).



## ***Assessment Design and Development***

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*The extent to which the consortium is developing a comprehensive assessment system that measures student knowledge against the full range of the college- and career-ready standards, including the standards against which student achievement has traditionally been difficult to measure; provides an accurate measure of achievement, including for high- and low-performing students, and an accurate measure of student growth over a full academic year or course; and produces student achievement data and student growth data that can be used to determine whether individual students are college- and career-ready or on track to being college- and career-ready.*

### **ITEM DEVELOPMENT**

In year one of the grant, Smarter Balanced developed English language arts and mathematics content specifications that are vital to the consortium’s development of a system that assesses the full range of the content standards. The specifications provide clear, prioritized assessment targets on which the assessments can be based. A key component of the content specifications is the “claims” about student learning that will be measured and reported on the summative assessment. These claims, derived from the CCSS, are evidence-based statements about what students know and can do as demonstrated by their performance on the assessment. The claims for English language arts and mathematics are:

#### **English language arts**

- Reading
- Writing
- Speaking and listening
- Research

#### **Mathematics**

- Concepts and procedures
- Problem solving
- Communicating reasoning
- Modeling and data analysis

The specifications documents were developed with input from content experts, work group members, and technical advisory committee (TAC) members. In addition, more than 200 individuals and organizations provided feedback on public drafts of the specifications. The English language arts specifications were finalized in January 2012 and the mathematics specifications in March 2012.

In addition, Smarter Balanced developed additional documents to guide item and task writing and reviewing which are available on its website. For example, Smarter Balanced developed item and task specifications, style guides, and writer and reviewer training materials. In addition, 21 training videos were prepared for educators and posted on the Smarter Balanced website on topics such as evidence-centered design,<sup>3</sup> which is the consortium’s approach to item-writing; universal design; bias and sensitivity; accessibility; depth of knowledge; item and performance task design; and grade-level considerations for test development. The videos serve as a component of the item writer and reviewer trainings.

For the first phase of item development in advance of the pilot test in spring 2013, the consortium developed 5,000 English language arts and mathematics items and tasks across grades 3-8 and 11. The items include selected-response, constructed-response, and technology-enhanced items, as well as performance tasks. Approximately half of the English language arts and mathematics items for the pilot test were written by item writers under contract with the vendor and the remainder was written by vendor-trained educators from the consortium states. Items underwent several reviews by the Smarter Balanced English language arts and mathematics content directors, work group members, and educator committees

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<sup>3</sup> The three basic elements of Evidence Centered Design (ECD) are: (1) stating the claims to be made about test takers, (2) deciding on the evidence that is required to support the claims, and (3) administering the test items that provide the required evidence.

made up of content, bias and sensitivity, and accessibility experts from member states. Higher education representatives and external content experts also reviewed grade 11 items.

In order to facilitate the timely resolution of problems that occur in assessment development, in summer 2012 Smarter Balanced created an internal test development committee, the assessment management group (AMG), to discuss important assessment design issues from a research and policy perspective and to address and resolve issues in assessment development. The group, which meets bi-weekly, consists of the executive director, executive committee co-chairs, and Linda Darling-Hammond, who serves on the TAC and as the senior research advisor.

The consortium will separately contract in year three for items and tasks for the field test (approximately 38,000 items are anticipated to be developed through that contract). The request for proposals (RFP) for this contract was released in December 2012 and builds on the lessons learned from the initial item writing.

Smarter Balanced publicly released sample items in October 2012 on an interactive website to provide states, stakeholders, and the public with an early view of the types of items likely to be on the Smarter Balanced assessment system. The release included a small number of items in each subject, grouped by grade bands 3-5, 6-8, and high school. Selected-response, constructed-response, and technology-enhanced items, as well as performance tasks, are included in the item sets. The item sets also demonstrate learning progressions across grades and increasing cognitive complexity within grades and specific content standards. The samples are located at [www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks/](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks/).

#### TEST DESIGN AND BLUEPRINTS

During the second year of the grant, Smarter Balanced spent considerable time developing and revising its summative test design and blueprints for English language arts and mathematics. The test blueprints are essential for both assessment developers and curriculum and instruction specialists because they provide information on the English language arts and mathematics content that is to be included on the assessments, the emphasis and balance of content, and item types. The member states approved preliminary test blueprints in fall 2012 that provide sufficient assessment items to report an overall student score in each subject as well as a score for each claim. For English language arts, students will receive a score on reading, writing, speaking and listening, and research. For mathematics, the problem solving and modeling and data analysis claims have been combined; students will receive scores on concepts and procedures; problem solving/modeling and data analysis; and communicating reasoning.

#### ACHIEVEMENT LEVEL DESCRIPTORS (ALDs)

ALDs are statements that articulate the knowledge, skills, and abilities represented at different levels of performance (Below Basic, Basic, Proficient, Advanced) on the Smarter Balanced assessments. They describe how students are progressing toward mastery of the CCSS and provide clear explanations of student performance for educators, parents, and policymakers. In October 2012, based on collaboration among the Smarter Balanced work groups, K-12 state leads, higher education leads, and state educators, Smarter Balanced released initial ALDs for grades 3-8 and 11 for public comment. Smarter Balanced anticipates that member states will adopt the ALDs in March 2013. Smarter Balanced identified four achievement levels, with level 3 for 11th-graders indicating that the student demonstrates “adequate understanding of and ability to apply the knowledge and skills associated with college content-readiness” and that those students performing at level 3 are “exempt from developmental course work, contingent on evidence of continued learning in Grade 12.”<sup>4</sup> The ALDs will be refined, as necessary, following the field test in spring 2014 and the first operational test in spring 2015.

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<sup>4</sup> See [www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Smarter-Balanced-ELA-Literacy-ALDs.pdf](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/11/Smarter-Balanced-ELA-Literacy-ALDs.pdf), page viii.

## RESEARCH

Smarter Balanced continues to rely on its thirteen member TAC for expertise and guidance related to assessment, psychometrics, research, and the inclusion of students with disabilities and English learners in assessment systems. The TAC was convened for three face-to-face meetings between December 2011 and December 2012. Members were briefed on background information prior to each face-to-face meeting via webinar. During year two, the TAC's broad focus included the development of the consortium's assessment blueprints; pilot item and task selection, scoring, and analysis; the framework for accessibility and accommodations; the development of ALDs, including a consortium-wide common definition of college- and career-ready; and the development of a research plan.

In summer 2012, Smarter Balanced contracted with Dr. Stephen Sireci to develop the research plan with input from the TAC members. This plan will establish the Smarter Balanced argument for validity and reliability in making inferences about students' college and career readiness. The research plan will be finalized early in 2013.

In April and May 2012, the consortium conducted focus groups with educators to gather data that would help inform the item-writing process. Educators were asked to review items and tasks and provide feedback on the clarity of instructions that would be given to students, the cognitive processes required of students to correctly answer the test questions, and the appropriateness of accommodations that would be offered to students during testing. These data were used to inform the development of items for the consortium's cognitive lab studies. Cognitive labs were then conducted to determine how students approach and interact with different types of computer-administered items. In addition, small-scale item trials were conducted with over 11,000 students in grades 4, 7, and 11 to gather the student responses needed to inform both automated and human scoring and to "try out" tasks.

Smarter Balanced also conducted a comprehensive literature review of its states on inclusion, accessibility, and accommodations features. It developed case studies regarding the use of braille, signing, and universal design. In addition, the consortium developed accommodations policies and implementation guidelines to support item writing and reviewing. The six documents making up these guidelines are available at [www.smarterbalanced.org/parents-students/support-for-under-represented-students/](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/parents-students/support-for-under-represented-students/).

## LESSONS LEARNED

In anticipation of a spring 2013 pilot test that will inform the field test and operational test administrations, Smarter Balanced dedicated much of its time during year two to the development of assessment blueprints and items and tasks. The consortium adopted preliminary blueprints that will provide an overall measure of student performance as well as a measure of performance for the English language arts and mathematics claims formally adopted by the consortium.

During the process of writing and reviewing items in summer and fall 2012, Smarter Balanced realized it did not have sufficient checks on its system to ensure that the items were covering the intended breadth of the CCSS nor that quality expectations were being met by the contractor. Recognizing the importance of having strong quality control measures, the consortium revised its processes for monitoring and reviewing alignment to the CCSS and quality throughout future item development cycles. In order to provide a focus on alignment and quality, and to increase the percentage of machine-scored items, the consortium reduced the number of items developed for the pilot test from 10,000 to 5,000. The consortium also formed the AMG to respond quickly to design issues. In addition, the consortium used the lessons learned from the pilot test item writing contract to draft the item writing contract for the field test, increasing the number of quality checks and the inclusion of additional content expertise.

In its approved application, Smarter Balanced proposed that some items would be donated by states from their existing assessment systems. During year two, the consortium eliminated this approach due to the prohibitive cost of reviewing and converting the items to be compatible with the Smarter Balanced system

and risks to item security. This change does not impact the number of items Smarter Balanced expects to develop during the life of the grant in advance of the first operational assessment in the 2014-2015 school year.

#### LOOKING AHEAD

A major focus of the consortium during year three of the grant will be the administration and scoring of the pilot test. The test will be administered from mid-February to late May to approximately one million students in schools selected for the pilot based on a stratified sampling plan. Data collected from the pilot test will be used to inform item writing, accessibility features, accommodations, and test administration decisions for the field test and operational test. The pilot test will provide an opportunity for the consortium to research the possibility of machine scoring as many of the items as possible to determine the feasibility of relying on machine scoring for the field test in spring 2014 and the first operational assessment in the 2014-2015 school year to a greater extent than that of current assessment systems. The consortium will use the information gained from the pilot test to improve guidelines to its item writers so that items will be created to maximize the likelihood that they can be machine-scored.

For schools not selected to be part of the pilot test, Smarter Balanced will publicly release practice tests in grades 3-8 and 11 in English language arts and mathematics in May 2013. The practice tests will be a short version of the assessment and will follow the draft test blueprints, allowing teachers, parents, and students to experience an assessment aligned to the Common Core standards. In addition, the practice test will provide a preview of the test platform and some accessibility features.

Smarter Balanced released an RFP in December 2012 for the scoring of the pilot and field tests and the field test item development and expects to award the contract in March 2013.<sup>5</sup> The contract requires the development of 38,000 items during years three and four of the grant, to include selected-response, constructed-response, and technology-enhanced items and performance tasks.

During year three, Smarter Balanced will complete, through a contract with the Human Resources Research Organization (HumRRO), an item procurement study to determine the feasibility and sustainability of using both the state-managed and Smarter Balanced-managed approaches to item development. The consortium began incorporating the state-managed approach during pilot item development and will increase the scale for the field test; ten percent of the items developed through the field test item development contract will be developed by states (which may choose to either develop the items themselves or through their own contract). States will be required to develop high-quality items that fully meet all Smarter Balanced guidelines and specifications. Smarter Balanced will be the sole owner of the items developed using this approach.

Smarter Balanced will continue to make policy decisions related to accessibility and accommodations for students with disabilities and English learners. The consortium expects to release its guidelines for accessibility and accommodations as well as the consortium's common definition of English learner. They will be included in the field test administration manual in fall 2013.

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<sup>5</sup> Smarter Balanced awarded this contract in April 2013.

## ***Professional Capacity, Outreach, and Communications***

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*The extent to which the consortium is supporting member states in implementing rigorous college- and career-ready standards, supporting educators in implementing the assessment system, and informing and building support among the public and key stakeholders.*

### PROFESSIONAL CAPACITY

During year two, Smarter Balanced continued efforts to provide professional capacity to its member states as they transition to the CCSS. Smarter Balanced provided membership to governing states to participate in the Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) initiative, Implementing the Common Core. Teams of state representatives met in December 2011 and April and August 2012. The meetings focused on preparing and supporting educators and administrators for the transition to the new content standards. The consortium also held a series of informational webinars for member states, their staff, and other Smarter Balanced partners on key components of the assessment system, such as computer-adaptive testing, computer-based braille interfaces, and the California Early Assessment Program.

Smarter Balanced expanded the involvement of teachers in the assessment development process by including them as item writers and reviewers. In an effort to coordinate this involvement, Smarter Balanced asked each member state to identify a teacher involvement coordinator to disseminate information on opportunities for teacher participation in Smarter Balanced activities, assist in the recruitment of teachers, and coordinate with Smarter Balanced on the final selection of participants for various activities.

In the approved Smarter Balanced application, the consortium committed to developing a digital library application in year two, establishing processes for ensuring the quality of digital library resources, developing exemplar instructional modules in English language arts and mathematics, and developing professional learning materials on assessment literacy. The consortium released the RFP for this work in August 2012; the work will begin in year three. As in the assessment development process, educator engagement is an integral part of the development of the digital library application. Not only will educators benefit from the resources provided by the consortium, they will also help determine processes for ensuring the quality of the resources.

### COMMUNICATIONS

Communicating regularly and effectively across a large number of member states presents challenges for the consortium. A constant and deep level of communication is required to ensure that state, district, and school personnel, as well as key stakeholders, understand the consortium's progress and activities, support the consortium's assessment development, and know what is expected of them to further the consortium's success and sustainability.

In February 2012, Smarter Balanced launched its new public website: [www.smarterbalanced.org](http://www.smarterbalanced.org). The website increased the transparency of the consortium by making information on consortium governance, activities, and progress readily available. In addition to the public website, Smarter Balanced has maintained its internal, password-protected website for member states. This site permits the consortium to share documents for internal review before they are made public and eases communication across the geographically diverse member states.

Information included on the consortium's public website includes updates on Smarter Balanced activities as well as many documents on item and test development. Also, in year two, the consortium introduced "Smarter News," its monthly eNewsletter that features updates from Executive Director Joe Willhoft, current and upcoming consortium activities, frequently asked questions, and articles contributed by the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). The newsletter currently has 7,000 subscribers. Smarter

Balanced continues to disseminate weekly and quarterly email updates to all members and stakeholders to keep them apprised of consortium activities.

Smarter Balanced communicates regularly with consortium leaders in the states. Throughout year two, the consortium held monthly calls with chief state school officers or their deputies as well as a monthly call for all governing and advisory state leads, executive committee members, executive staff, and work group leadership. The consortium also held semi-annual, in-person meetings of chief state school officers or their deputies. During year two, Smarter Balanced established semi-yearly collaboration conferences that provide an opportunity for work group staff and contractors, as well as consortium leaders from Smarter Balanced and the states, to discuss consortium projects and issues related to assessment design and implementation. In addition, Smarter Balanced began distributing monthly talking points to its member states to assist in communicating information about the consortium.

#### HIGHER EDUCATION ENGAGEMENT

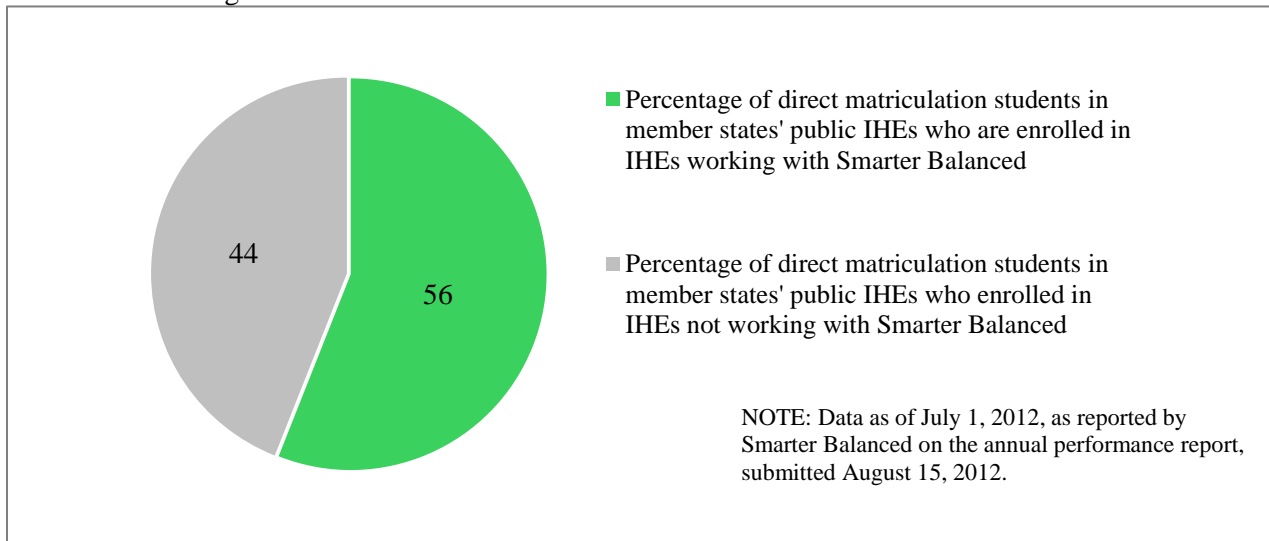
In year two, Smarter Balanced identified a higher education state lead for each member state. These leads include key higher education leaders and faculty members from the consortium states. The state leads are counterparts to the K-12 leads in the states and collaborate with them on issues encompassing K-12 and higher education. During year two, the state leads met in person for three meetings and participated in virtual monthly meetings as well as periodic informational webinars. In addition, Smarter Balanced contracted with five regional advisors to provide guidance and assistance to the higher education state leads. The regional advisors visit their states at least twice each year and meet with the state leads by phone monthly. The main role of the advisors is to disseminate information on the Smarter Balanced assessments, respond to questions and concerns from higher education, and provide recommendations to states on strategic approaches for aligning the K-12 and higher education relationship.

The five regional advisors assisted the higher education state leads to each develop an implementation plan for their state that will build support for the consortium and also establish the policies for exempting from remedial courses those students who meet the consortium's standards for being college- and career-ready. The state and regional representatives have also been engaged in discussions around ALDs for the consortium, in particular the alignment of the grades 8 and 11 ALDs.

Data from the Smarter Balanced annual performance report (APR) showing higher education involvement in the consortium are provided in Figure 3. As of July 1, 2012, Smarter Balanced is working with 161 institutions of higher education (IHEs) that have committed to implementing policies that exempt from remedial courses and place into credit-bearing college courses any student who meets the consortium-adopted achievement standard for each assessment and any other placement requirement established by the IHE or IHE system.



Figure 3. Percentage of direct matriculation students in Smarter Balanced member states who attend an IHE that is working with Smarter Balanced



#### LESSONS LEARNED

The consortium recognized during year two that it must be diligent in expanding its outreach efforts. Regularly communicating with member states, districts, and key stakeholders about the specific progress the consortium is making is important to building support for the consortium. The consortium took several initiatives in year two to expand its outreach efforts. For example, the consortium hosted regional meetings of chief state school officers, governors education advisors, and higher education leaders to discuss college- and career-readiness, launched its monthly eNewsletter, “Smarter News,” and the monthly talking points. Communications remains a work in progress, however, and building an understanding of and support for the consortium’s work by states, districts, schools, the public, and other key stakeholders is critical to the consortium’s success. Gaining and maintaining support is essential to the successful implementation of the consortium’s assessment system and to sustainability following the end of the grant.

#### LOOKING AHEAD

In year three of the grant, Smarter Balanced will launch a digital library, which will include formative tasks and tools, exemplar modules, and assessment literacy professional development that will be made available to teachers as they transition from their state standards and assessments to the CCSS and Smarter Balanced assessments. A national panel of experts identified by the consortium will work with state leadership teams and networks of educators to develop quality criteria policies for all resources that will be created or recommended from existing resources for the digital library. The director of professional learning will lead this endeavor.

In addition, Smarter Balanced will continue its efforts to engage higher education in developing the consortium’s assessment system. The higher education leads in the member states will continue to collaborate with the K-12 state leads on developing state-level consensus positions on college readiness policy and achievement level descriptors and begin implementing their plans for transitioning to the consortium’s assessments.



## ***Technology***

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*The extent to which the consortium is using technology to the maximum extent appropriate to develop, administer, and score assessments and report results.*

Following the release of the consortium's information technology (IT) systems architecture in early 2012, Smarter Balanced began developing the technology needed to deliver its intended next-generation assessment system. The system will include technology-enhanced items that can better capture the range and extent of students' knowledge and abilities compared to traditional test items through the use of a computer-adaptive test (CAT) design that will adjust the difficulty of questions throughout the assessment based on the student response to previous questions.

### INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY ARCHITECTURE

In January 2012, Smarter Balanced released an IT architecture that lays out the consortium's plan for establishing the technology that will support the assessment system being developed. It serves as the development guide for all future consortium technology work, including the item authoring application and item bank, test engine, the scoring and reporting systems, and the digital library of formative tools and resources for teachers. Smarter Balanced intends that the IT systems architecture will be updated periodically throughout the development of the assessment system. Revised documents will be made available online and through an iPad application to ensure access to the latest information. The application allows users to access, bookmark, and share content and automatically download updates. As a component of the IT systems architecture, in February 2012, the consortium created an Architecture Review Board (ARB). The ARB, comprised of state elementary and secondary and higher education representatives and members of the Smarter Balanced technology work group, meets twice per month. It oversees further development of the IT systems architecture and makes recommendations regarding technology standards to the executive committee throughout the development of the assessment system.

Smarter Balanced began developing several components of its technology system during year two. In April 2012, the consortium awarded a contract for the creation of an item authoring and item pool application whereby item authors can directly create and store items. The application will be implemented in year three following the pilot test. Smarter Balanced also awarded a contract for the CAT engine. The consortium's approach for the test delivery engine is that for the spring 2013 pilot test, the CAT engine will use the modified proprietary system developed by its contractor, AIR. For the field test, the CAT engine will be adjusted as the consortium determines necessary, with the CAT engine being made open source following the field test and in advance of the first operational assessment in the 2014-2015 school year. In September 2012, Smarter Balanced awarded a contract for the development of the reporting system.

### DISTRICT AND SCHOOL TECHNOLOGY READINESS

In year two, Smarter Balanced and PARCC jointly collaborated to develop a technology readiness tool. The purpose of the tool is to periodically evaluate the technology and infrastructure readiness of the consortium's member states, districts, and schools to deliver the computer-based assessment systems each consortium is developing. Each state was asked to identify a state readiness coordinator (SRC) who is responsible for coordinating the effort to complete the readiness tool in his or her state; communicating with the school and district personnel in the state, and facilitating training of district staff; answering questions from districts; and assisting in configuring state, district, or school organizational data.

The first data collection occurred between March and June 2012 and consisted of developing an inventory of districts' current technology. The response rate for the consortium's member states varied widely, but data were provided for approximately 50 percent of the schools in the member states across the two consortiums. The data showed that approximately 6 million computers are being used for instructional

purposes in those schools. Table 1 below indicates the levels of participation for each Smarter Balanced state in identifying technology inventory information at the school level. Figure 4 shows the operating systems in use in Smarter Balanced states as a percentage of reported devices. Figure 5 shows device types in Smarter Balanced states as a percentage of reported devices.

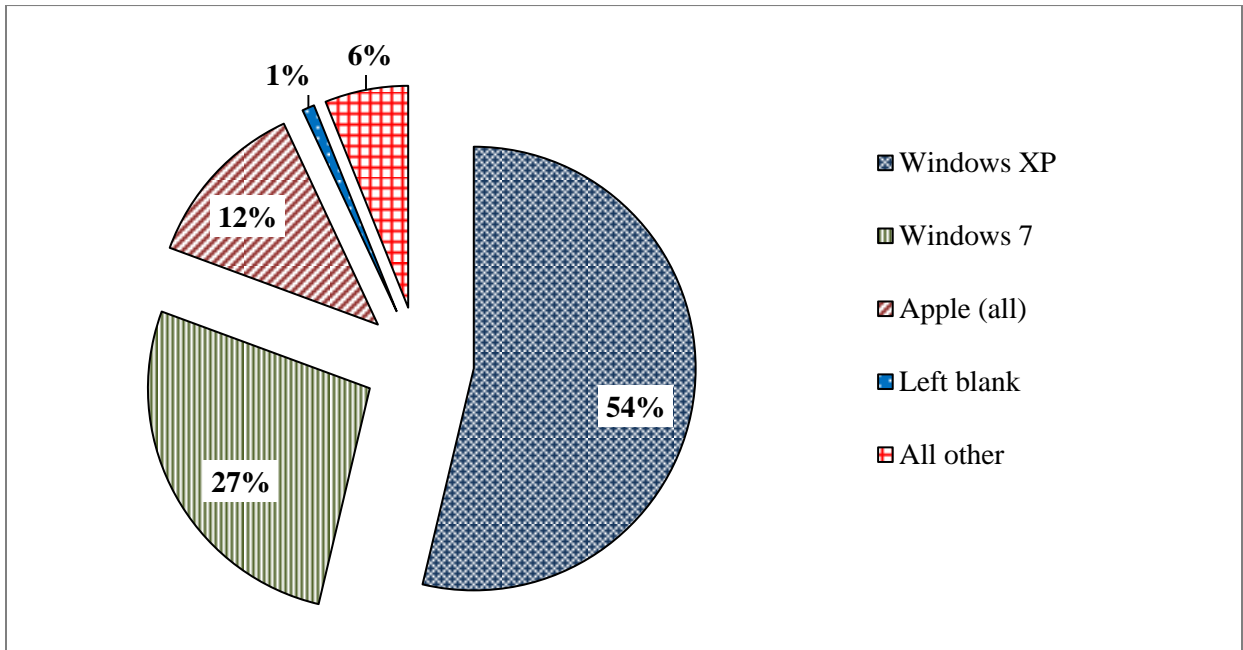
Table 1. Technology inventory school-level completion

State	Number of Schools Submitting Complete Data	Percentage of Schools Completed	Number of Devices Reported
California	4,344	44.1%	613,829
Colorado	0	0.0%	204
Connecticut	1,043	106.2%	182,620
Delaware	204	102.5%	68,343
Hawaii	0	0.0%	0
Idaho	320	48.9%	30,511
Iowa	0	0.0%	0
Kansas	0	0.0%	0
Maine	0	0.0%	0
Michigan	1,389	38.3%	246,203
Missouri	1,964	89.3%	198,269
Montana	22	2.7%	1,932
Nevada	157	26.6%	11,853
New Hampshire	220	47.1%	37,008
North Carolina	1,553	61.7%	480,039
North Dakota	145	30.1%	14,438
Oregon	142	11.4%	31,261
Pennsylvania	0	0.0%	1
South Carolina	752	67.0%	206,079
South Dakota	6	0.9%	3,380
Vermont	266	86.6%	32,267
Washington	307	13.2%	50,326
West Virginia	751	98.9%	66,035
Wisconsin	48	2.3%	8,559
Wyoming	0	0.0%	0

Source: Draft technology inventory data, as of July 2012 snapshot, based on Pearson’s report to the consortia and data shared by Smarter Balanced.

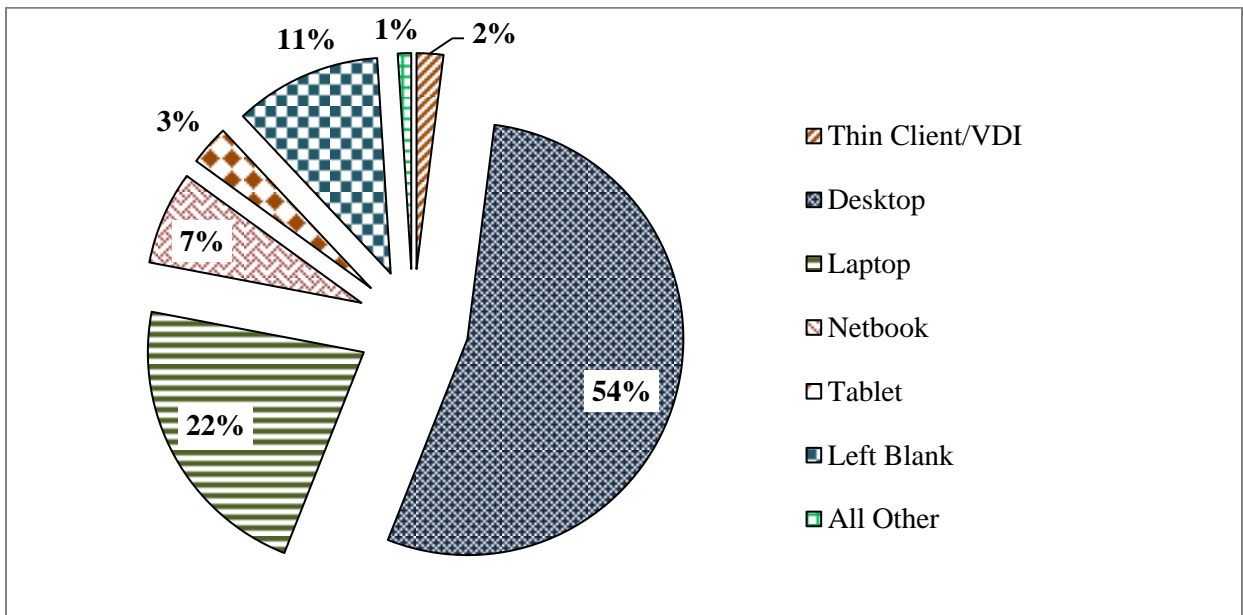
Note: The percent of schools that entered data (second data column) is compared with 2009-2010 public data from U.S. Department of Education, Ed Data Express, as summarized by the Pearson report to the consortia. The Ed Data Express information is available online at [www.eddataexpress.ed.gov/state-tables-report.cfm](http://www.eddataexpress.ed.gov/state-tables-report.cfm). If states reported on behalf of schools, results may show 0 schools reporting but still identify some reported devices. Variance in the number of schools since the 2009-2010 reference year and the 2011-2012 school year could also account for unusual percentages.

Figure 4. Operating systems in use in Smarter Balanced states (as a percentage of total devices)



Source: Draft technology inventory data, as of July 2012 snapshot, shared by Smarter Balanced.

Figure 5. Device types in Smarter Balanced states (as a percentage of reported devices)



Source: Draft technology inventory data, as of July 2012 snapshot, shared by Smarter Balanced.

In April 2012, the consortium, in conjunction with PARCC, released guidance to states and districts regarding the technology specifications for any new hardware purchases. Most new hardware will be sufficient to administer the Smarter Balanced assessments. In particular, the consortium committed to permitting large tablets, such as the Apple iPad (2nd generation and later), with 9.5 inch screens to be

used to administer the assessments. In October 2012, Smarter Balanced released the minimum hardware requirements for implementing the consortium’s assessment system. The specifications establish that most current technology in schools will support the administration of the assessments in the 2014-2015 school year and also establish how the technology requirements will be refreshed during the first several operational years. This is vital information to help states and districts prepare for the transition to the new computer-administered assessment systems.

Table 2. Smarter Balanced technology specifications

<b>Operating System</b>	<b>Minimum Smarter Balanced Requirements for Current Computers[1][2][3]</b>	<b>Recommended Smarter Balanced Minimum for New Purchases</b>
Windows	Windows XP (service pack 3) Pentium 233 MHz processor 128 MB RAM 52 MB hard drive free space	Windows 7+ 1 GHz processor 1 GB RAM 80 GB hard drive or at least 1 GB of hard drive space available
Mac OS X	Mac OS X 10.4.4 Macintosh computer with Intel x86 or PowerPC G3 (300 MHz) processor, 256 MB RAM, 200 MB hard drive free space	Mac OS X 10.7+ 1 GHz processor 1 GB RAM 80 GB hard drive or at least 1 GB of hard drive space available
Linux	Linux (Ubuntu 9-10, Fedora 6) Pentium II or AMD K6-III 233 MHz processor 64 MB RAM 52 MB hard drive free space	Linux (Ubuntu 11.10, Fedora 16) 1 GHz processor 1 GB RAM 80 GB hard drive or at least 1 GB of hard drive space available
iOS	iPads 2 and 3 running iOS6	iPads running iOS6
Android	Android based tablets running Android 4.0+	Android based tablets running Android 4.0+
Windows	Windows-based tablets running Windows 8+ (excluding Windows RT)	Windows-based tablets running Windows 8+ (excluding Windows RT)
Chrome OS	Chromebooks running Chrome OS (v19)+	Chromebooks running Chrome OS (v19)+

Source: [www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Technology-Strategy-Framework\\_2-6-13.pdf](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/Technology-Strategy-Framework_2-6-13.pdf).

[1] The minimum Smarter Balanced requirements are generally equivalent to the minimum requirements of the associated eligible operating system. Users should refer to the minimum requirements of the operating system as a means of resolving any ambiguities in the minimum Smarter Balanced requirements.

[2] These guidelines do not supersede the minimum requirements of the operating systems.

[3] 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. Tablets may require the use of a mouse.

To support continued innovation during and after the grant period in assessment delivery, scoring, data warehousing, and reporting systems, and in accordance with grant requirements, Smarter Balanced must develop all assessment items to an industry-recognized open-licensed interoperability standard that is approved by the Department during the grant period, without non-standard extensions or additions and produce all student-level data in a manner consistent with an industry-recognized open-licensed

interoperability standard that is approved by the Department during the grant period. During year two, the Department sponsored initial collaboration around interoperability standards across the PARCC, Smarter Balanced, NCSC and DLM consortia through the Common Education Data Standards (CEDS) process.

CEDS is a national collaborative effort to develop voluntary, common data standards for a key set of education data elements to streamline the exchange and comparison of data across institutions and sectors. The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) leads the process and convened the consortia and vendors to craft an initial map of which technology standards best suit different aspects of information exchange for assessment systems. This framework is called the Assessment Interoperability Framework (AIF) and involves substantial collaboration between two external standards entities, the SIF Association and IMS, and their members, which include many assessment companies. After numerous stakeholder and vendor conversations, the first draft of CEDS-AIF elements was released for public comment in early fall 2012. After reviewing the comments, a revised version of the CEDS-AIF standards was publicly released in winter 2012, and the CEDS contractors facilitated vendors' testing of the technology standards. In addition, CEDS-AIF is one component of the larger CEDS work and was included in the CEDS version 3.0 release in early January 2013.

#### LESSONS LEARNED

Smarter Balanced realized the need for a chief technology officer (CTO) to lead the consortium's development of the assessment technology system and to provide assistance to states as they transition to the next-generation assessments. The consortium is actively searching to fill this position.<sup>6</sup>

#### LOOKING AHEAD

Smarter Balanced will complete its second data collection on technology readiness in early 2013 and will continue to gather data throughout summer 2013. With the identification of the minimum technology specifications, the technology readiness tool can now report data to schools, districts, and states regarding the number of computers that can support the consortium's assessment system and identify where technology gaps exist. This data will be an invaluable planning tool for districts and states as they consider future technology needs.

During year three of the grant, Smarter Balanced will further develop the technology components of its assessment system and will begin using the item authoring and item pool application. The consortium will also begin developing the remaining pieces of the technology system, such as the reporting application. Additionally, the consortia will continue efforts to implement the CEDS-AIF to ensure that the consortium's assessment system provides interoperable assessments and student data.

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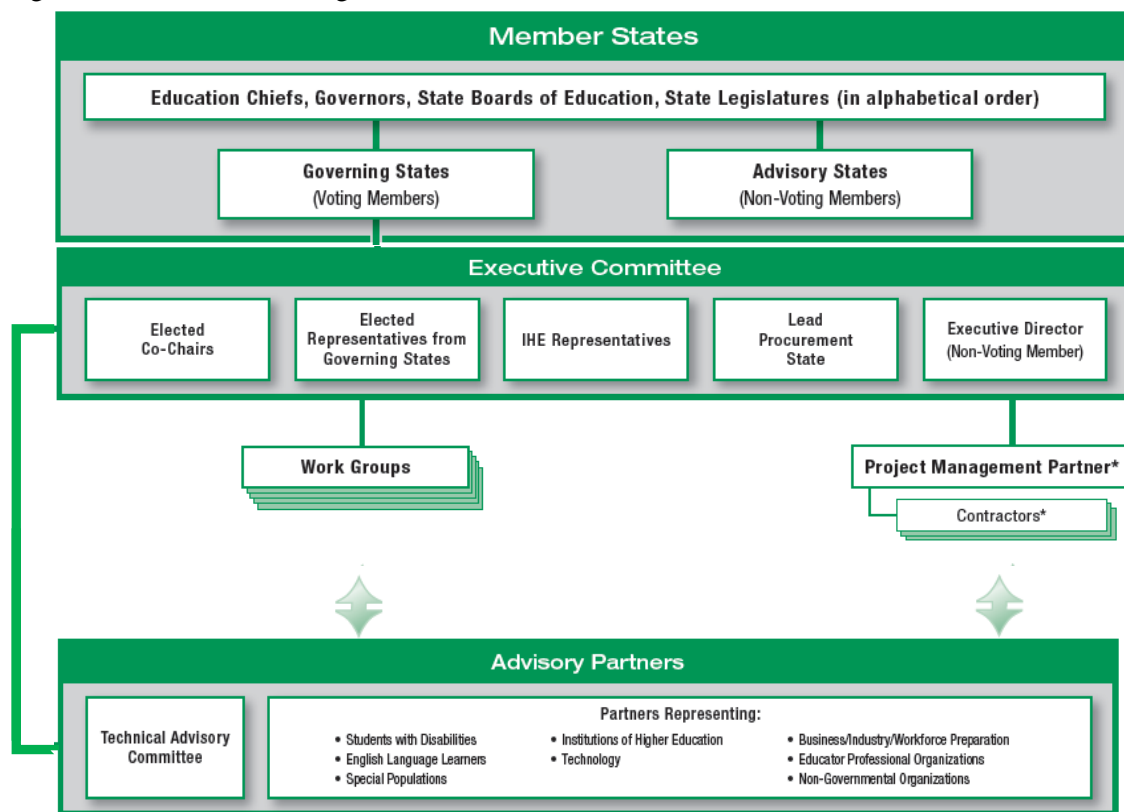
<sup>6</sup> Smarter Balanced hired a CTO in April 2013.

## Governance

*The consortium's approach to internal organization and capacity, project management, and procurement to permit timely decision-making and the efficient development and implementation of its assessment system.*

After spending much of the first year of the grant developing working processes and a strong, viable governance structure, Smarter Balanced dedicated year two to establishing policies and processes required for developing and delivering an operational assessment system to member states in the 2014-2015 school year. The consortium made policy decisions related to the design of the assessments, draft ALDs, and technology to support the assessment system. Contracts have been executed for most of the work necessary to develop the Smarter Balanced assessment system, including test development, test delivery, and reporting. Figure 6 shows the consortium's governance structure.

Figure 6. Smarter Balanced governance structure



Source: [www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Smarter-Balanced-Governance.pdf](http://www.smarterbalanced.org/wordpress/wp-content/uploads/2012/02/Smarter-Balanced-Governance.pdf).

### LEADERSHIP

In year two of the grant, Smarter Balanced maintained and refined its working governance structure under the continued general leadership of Executive Director Joe Willhoft and Chief Operating Officer Tony Alpert. During year two, the consortium hired a Director for Support of Under-Represented Students, Director for English Language Arts and Literacy, and Director for Mathematics. This brings the consortium staff to a total of eight positions. Two new positions identified in year two, a Director for Professional Learning and a CTO, had not been filled at the end of the second year. WestEd is contracted as the Program Management Partner to support the consortium's work.

Smarter Balanced is led by an elected executive committee that meets biweekly and is comprised of nine voting members. The committee is led by two elected co-chairs. In year two, the co-chairs were Joseph Martineau of the Michigan Department of Education and Carissa Miller from the Idaho Department of Education. The committee also consists of two representatives from higher education and five additional governing state assessment directors.

Smarter Balanced continues to rely upon its work groups, comprised of a team of state assessment staff or curriculum experts, to support and oversee the development of the assessment system. In April 2012, Smarter Balanced added two higher education representatives to each group to ensure that all activities include a higher education perspective and a higher education and K-12 connection. During year two, the consortium consolidated its original ten work groups into five to increase collaboration and coordination across work groups having similar functions. The consortium believes that combining the work groups into five groups will help ensure alignment in work plans and products across the full consortium.

In addition to weekly and monthly newsletters and internal website communications with all consortium leaders, Executive Director Joe Willhoft holds biweekly all-states teleconferences to inform state leadership of pending consortium business and actions needed. In December 2012, the consortium began hosting regional meetings of state leaders for chief state school officers, governors' education advisors, and higher education leaders. Additionally throughout year two, the consortium hosted a monthly teleconference with chief state school officers or their deputies to keep them informed of consortium business. In an effort to further engage leaders in the work of the consortium, Smarter Balanced identified key policy decisions that will be required of states over the duration of a project, including the timeline and role of K-12 and higher education in each key decision.

To facilitate coordination on key consortium projects and discussion around assessment design and implementation issues, Smarter Balanced began a twice-yearly collaboration conference that includes all work group staff and contractors, as well as consortium leaders from Smarter Balanced and the states. Collaboration conferences were held in February and September 2012. The conferences include specific meetings for the executive committee, chief state school officers, and state leads; contractors for each project and corresponding work group members; and all contractors and Smarter Balanced leaders.

#### ADVISORY GROUPS

During year two, the consortium created several advisory committees to provide guidance on specific content impacting the development of the assessment system. The English language learners and students with disabilities advisory committees provided guidance on the development of the consortium's accommodations policies and implementation guidelines and will continue to advise the consortium throughout its development of an accessible assessment for all students. The Proficiency Based Learning Task Force identified and documented common definitions and the ultimate implications of proficiency-based learning in the development and implementation of state assessments aligned with the CCSS and made recommendations for how the Smarter Balanced assessment system could support states interested in pursuing a proficiency-based system.

Smarter Balanced created a Sustainability Task Force in fall 2011, which continued into year two, to provide recommendations for how states will procure, administer, and maintain the next-generation assessment system following the end of the grant period in September 2014. Members of the task force include the chief operating officer, executive director, one executive committee co-chair, three chief state school officers, two governors or their aides, two staff leading their state's involvement in the consortium, two state procurement experts, two state central information officers, and two higher education representatives. The chief operating officer facilitate the group. The consortium received external funding in year two to identify options and define specific steps and processes needed to establish a sustainable structure.



## PROCUREMENT

Smarter Balanced made significant progress in procuring components of its assessment system. Thirteen of the seventeen contracts contemplated for the summative assessments have been awarded, with twelve of those awarded during year two of the grant. The contracts include the technology readiness tool, item specifications, psychometric services, accessibility and accommodations policy guidelines, item authoring/item pool application, item and task materials development, test and CAT specifications, test engine development for the pilot and field test, preliminary ALDs, item and task writing and reviewing for the pilot test, report development, and test administration. Three of the remaining contracts (translations, pilot and field test scoring and field test item development,<sup>7</sup> and field test administration) will be awarded during year three of the grant. The fourth contract (achievement standards setting) is anticipated to be awarded during year four. In addition, a formative assessment contract that includes a digital library, formative practices, and professional learning will be awarded in year three.

## LESSONS LEARNED

During year two, as Smarter Balanced placed an increasing focus on item and task development, the consortium realized the necessity of providing clear guidance to contractors while monitoring and evaluating products and timelines to ensure that items and tasks are developed according to consortium expectations for quality. As the contract work evolved, the consortium realized that its initial plan for having work group members provide project management for contracts related to their work group was insufficient and that there was a need for additional individuals dedicated to managing the myriad contracts currently in place. Smarter Balanced contracted with five managers, consisting of staff from consortium states or consultants, to manage contracts related to the development of components of the summative assessment. The consortium must continue to closely monitor the work of its contractors to ensure that critical deadlines are met and that quality control measures are enforced. The consortium also held collaboration conferences bringing together state leads, workgroup members, and contractors (described on pages 11 and 19) to promote better understanding of the contracts, how the contracts are interrelated to each other, and the issues surrounding assessment design.

Recognizing a need to determine the long-term sustainability of the assessment system being developed, Smarter Balanced will continue to support the Sustainability Task Force that was established in fall 2011. In year two, the consortium contracted for a consultant to inform its sustainability plans.

## LOOKING AHEAD

Smarter Balanced will hire a CTO to guide the consortium in the development of the technology systems to support the assessments.<sup>8</sup> The consortium plans to continue its regular communication with state leaders through biweekly executive committee and all states meetings, and monthly governing states, higher education leads, and chiefs meetings. In addition, the consortium will continue to hold twice-yearly in-person collaboration and TAC meetings. Smarter Balanced will finalize and begin to implement its sustainability plans so that its member states can put in place the necessary structure to support the first operational administration of the Smarter Balanced assessment system in the 2014-2015 school year.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> As noted in the Assessment Design and Development section, Smarter Balanced awarded the pilot and field test scoring and field test item development contract in April 2013.

<sup>8</sup> As noted in the Technology section, Smarter Balanced hired a CTO in April 2013.

<sup>9</sup> Smarter Balanced governing states formally voted in March 2013 to endorse a plan for the National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST) at UCLA to serve as a partner and host for the Smarter Balanced Consortium after the completion of the federal grant in September 2014.

## Conclusion

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As Smarter Balanced intended when it created its summative master work plan, the key focus of year two of the grant was the development of items for the summative assessment, the design of the assessment, and the technology needed to deliver the assessment system. This work will lead to the pilot test that begins in February 2013 and which will provide an opportunity for states, districts, schools, teachers, and students to begin to see what the assessments will look like. The pilot test will give the consortium an opportunity to test whether the items and the system are working as intended on a smaller scale in advance of the spring 2014 field test and operational test in the 2014-2015 school year. Initial research from a report released by CRESST in January 2013, *On the Road to Assessing Deeper Learning: The Status of Smarter Balanced and PARCC Assessment Consortia*, evaluated available evidence and data from Smarter Balanced and PARCC that suggested that both are building assessment systems responsive to the goals of the program by assessing deeper skills and knowledge, including complex skills and problem solving, significantly more than current statewide assessment systems.<sup>10</sup>

### SUCSESSES

During year two, the consortium made significant progress toward developing its assessment system and items.

- *Assessment Development*

Smarter Balanced item development is well underway. While the consortium encountered initial problems during item development in year two, it revised its process and developed items to support the pilot test in spring 2013. Smarter Balanced made publicly available a wealth of documents and training materials designed to guide item and task writing and reviewing (e.g., item and task specifications, style guides, item prototypes, frequently asked questions, writer and reviewer participation guidelines, and writer and reviewer training materials that include 21 training videos).

In October 2012, Smarter Balanced released sample items on an interactive website to provide states, stakeholders, and the public with an early view of the types of items likely to be found on the consortium's assessment system. The items, grouped by grade bands 3-5, 6-8, and high school, include a small number of both English language arts and mathematics items and tasks.

- *Initial Achievement Level Descriptors (ALDs)*

The consortium developed and released draft initial ALDs in fall 2012. ALDs describe how students are progressing toward mastery of the CCSS and provide clear explanations of student performance for educators, parents, and policymakers. The consortium included a broad group of educators to help draft the initial ALDs, including representatives from K-12 and higher education, to ensure they capture college- and career-readiness. The consortium released the ALDs for public comment and will finalize them in year three (but will revisit them once data on performance is available following the field test and first operational assessment).

- *Higher Education Engagement*

Smarter Balanced expanded the involvement of higher education in the work of the consortium. The consortium identified a higher education lead in each member state and contracted with five regional advisors to provide guidance and assistance to the higher education leads. The state and regional representatives have been involved in the development of strategies for aligning K-12 and higher education processes and policies, including the writing of a common definition of college- and career ready, the drafting of ALDs, and the development of a college readiness policy framework that

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<sup>10</sup> Herman, J.L. & Linn, R.L. (2013). *On the road to assessing deeper learning: The status of Smarter Balanced and PARCC assessment consortia*. (CRESST Report 823). Los Angeles, CA: University of California, National Center for Research on Evaluation, Standards, and Student Testing (CRESST).

describes the ALDs, what they mean for college content-readiness, and the implications for grade 12 and college placement.

- *Technology*

At the end of year two, all of the technology components required to support the assessment system are under development. During year two, Smarter Balanced awarded contracts for the creation of an item authoring and item bank application, the test delivery engine, and the reporting system. Notably, the consortium's test delivery engine will be developed to be made open source at the end of the grant period.

In year two, Smarter Balanced identified both the minimum technology specifications necessary to administer the assessment system and guidelines for states and districts regarding new technology purchases. This is important information for the field so that they may prepare for the new assessments. Early in 2013, the consortium will provide data to states and districts completing the technology readiness tool about their current readiness for the assessments. In fall 2012, the consortium also provided a tool for schools and districts to assess their bandwidth capacity.

#### CHALLENGES

The Department notes, however, that the consortium faced challenges in some areas.

- *Item Development*

While Smarter Balanced item development is well underway, the consortium also experienced several challenges. During the item review process in fall 2012, the consortium recognized that the review process for ensuring the quality of the items was not sufficient. As a result, the consortium revised the number of items that were developed for the pilot test (from 10,000 to 5,000) so that an additional review could occur to provide a clearer focus on quality and alignment to the CCSS. Moving forward, the consortium is going to be developing 38,000 items in year three for the field test in spring 2014. It is essential that Smarter Balanced maintain a strong process for determining the quality of the items being developed. This will require that the consortium monitor and evaluate the processes for writing and reviewing items as well as for reviewing the quality of the items themselves, and that the consortium include external content experts in English language arts and mathematics as a component of the item development processes. The RFP for field test item writing, released in December 2012, included several of these components to strengthen the consortium's quality control measures.

- *Communications*

As the consortium launches new initiatives and plans for sustainability after the grant ends in September 2014, it is critical that Smarter Balanced effectively communicate with state leaders, state educators, members of the public, and key interest groups. The support of each of these stakeholder groups is critical to the success of the consortium's assessment system. Smarter Balanced should continue to encourage the direct involvement of chief state school officers and other state education leaders in the consortium's decision making process through face-to-face and virtual meetings. The continued involvement of higher education leaders is necessary as the consortium finalizes policies around college and career readiness. Equally important is the involvement of members of the public and key interest groups in reviewing and providing feedback on various components of the assessment system.

The Department is pleased to note that the consortium has identified and taken initial steps to mitigate each of these risks and looks forward to collaborating with the consortium where possible to ensure the consortium's success.

Throughout the remainder of year three, Smarter Balanced will continue to take steps toward developing its next-generation assessment system that will be implemented in the 2014-2015 school year. The consortium will:

- Administer and score the pilot test, with the data being used to inform field test item development, administration policies for the field test and operational assessment, and the development of the computer-adaptive test engine.
- Develop 38,000 items for the field test that will assess student knowledge of the consortium's identified claims across the full spectrum of performance.
- Develop and launch a digital library of formative tools and resources to support educators in implementing the CCSS and Smarter Balanced assessment system.
- Continue to develop the IT system to support the development, administration, scoring, and reporting of the assessment system.
- Release results of the technology readiness tool for member states, districts, and schools that inventory the technology available and identify gaps to help states prepare for the new assessment system.
- Establish a model for the sustainability of the consortium following the end of the grant.

## *Glossary*

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**Accommodations** means changes in the administration of an assessment, including but not limited to changes in assessment setting, scheduling, timing, presentation format, response mode, and combinations of these changes, that do not change the construct intended to be measured by the assessment or the meaning of the resulting scores. Accommodations must be used for equity in assessment and not provide advantage to students eligible to receive them.

**Achievement level descriptors (ALDs)** are text statements that articulate the knowledge, skills, and abilities represented at different levels of student performance. The levels of performance on the Smarter Balanced assessments are defined as below basic, basic, proficient, and advanced.

**Achievement standard** means the level of student achievement on summative assessments that indicates that (a) for the final high school summative assessments in mathematics or English language arts, a student is college- and career-ready; or (b) for summative assessments in mathematics or English language arts at a grade level other than the final high school summative assessments, a student is on track to being college- and career-ready. An achievement standard must be determined using empirical evidence over time.

The **American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA)** was signed into law by President Obama on February 17, 2009. This historic legislation was designed to stimulate the economy, support job creation, and invest in critical sectors, including education. The U.S. Department of Education received a \$97.4 billion appropriation.

**College- and career-ready (or readiness)** means, with respect to a student, that the student is prepared for success, without remediation, in credit-bearing, entry-level courses in an institution of higher education (IHE) (as defined in section 101(a) of the HEA), as demonstrated by an assessment score that meets or exceeds the achievement standard for the final high school summative assessment in mathematics or English language arts.

**Common Core State Standards (CCSS)** are K-12 English language arts and mathematics standards developed in collaboration with a variety of stakeholders including states, governors, chief state school officers, content experts, teachers, school administrators, and parents. The standards establish clear and consistent goals for learning that will prepare America's children for success in college and careers. As of January 2012, the Common Core State Standards were adopted by 45 states and the District of Columbia.

**Common set of college- and career-ready standards** means a set of academic content standards for grades K-12 that (a) define what a student must know and be able to do at each grade level; (b) if mastered, would ensure that the student is college- and career-ready by the time of high school graduation; and (c) are substantially identical across all states in a consortium. A state may supplement the common set of college- and career-ready standards with additional content standards, provided that the additional standards do not comprise more than 15 percent of the state's total standards for that content area.

**Direct matriculation student** means a student who entered college as a freshman within two years of graduating from high school.

**English learner** means a student who is an English learner as that term is defined by the consortium. The consortium must define the term in a manner that is uniform across member states and consistent with section 9101(25) of the ESEA.

**Formative assessment** is a process used by teachers and students during instruction that provides feedback to adjust on-going teaching and learning to improve students' achievement of intended instructional outcomes. Thus, it is done by the teacher in the classroom for the explicit purpose of diagnosing where students are in their learning, where gaps in knowledge and understanding exist, and how to help teachers and students improve student learning. The assessment is generally embedded within the learning activity and linked directly to the current unit of instruction. The assessments are typically small-scale (less than a class period) and short-cycle. Furthermore, the tasks presented may vary from one student to another depending on the teacher's judgement about the need for specific information about a student at a given point in time. Providing corrective feedback, modifying instruction to improve the student's understanding, or indicating areas of further instruction are essential aspects of a classroom formative assessment.

**Governing state** means a state that (a) is a member of only one consortium applying for a grant in the competition category, (b) has an active role in policy decision-making for the consortium, and (c) is committed to using the assessment system or program developed by the consortium.

**Interim assessment** is the term for the assessments that fall between formative and summative assessments. They typically evaluate students' knowledge and skills relative to a specific set of academic goals within a limited timeframe and are designed to inform decisions at both the classroom and school or district level. They may be given at the classroom level to provide information for the teacher, but unlike true formative assessments, the results of interim assessments can be meaningfully aggregated and reported at a broader level. As such, the timing of the administration is likely to be controlled by the school or district rather than by the teachers. They may serve a variety of purposes, including predicting a student's ability to succeed on a large-scale summative assessment, evaluating a particular educational program or pedagogy, or diagnosing gaps in a student's learning.

**On track to being college- and career-ready** means, with respect to a student, that the student is performing at or above grade level such that the student will be college- and career-ready by the time of high school graduation, as demonstrated by an assessment score that meets or exceeds the achievement standard for the student's grade level on a summative assessment in mathematics or English language arts.

The **Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers (PARCC)** is one of two consortia of states awarded grants under the Race to the Top Assessment program to develop next-generation assessment systems that are aligned to common K-12 English language and mathematics standards and that will accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness.

The **Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (Smarter Balanced)** is one of two consortia of states awarded grants under the Race to the Top Assessment program to develop next-generation assessment systems that are aligned to common K-12 English language and mathematics standards and that will accurately measure student progress toward college and career readiness.

A **student with a disability** means, for purposes of this competition, a student who has been identified as a student with a disability under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act, as amended (IDEA), except for a student with a disability who is eligible to participate in alternate assessments based on alternate academic achievement standards consistent with 34 CFR 200.6(a)(2).

**Summative assessments** are generally given one time at the end of some unit of time such as the semester or school year to evaluate students' performance against a defined set of content standards. se assessments typically are given statewide and these days are usually used as part of an accountability program or to otherwise inform policy.





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