

























































### LESSONS LEARNED

During Year 2, Smarter Balanced contracted with individuals to serve as managers for the contracts related to the development of components of the assessment system. In Year 3, Smarter Balanced continued to have challenges receiving timely, high quality products from some contractors. Smarter Balanced leadership was actively engaged in raising concerns with contractors and requesting prompt resolution. In addition, as noted in *Assessment Design and Development*, Smarter Balanced substantially revised the item and task development process to address challenges identified in Year 2, instituting additional reviews and other quality control checks. As noted in *Professional Capacity, Communications, and Outreach*, Smarter Balanced identified challenges with the digital library resources and focused attention on making sure SLT and SNE members had sufficient training to identify, review, and approve resources that meet the consortium's expectations for quality.

In addition, in Year 3, Smarter Balanced realized the need to create ad hoc task forces and committees to address consortium needs, rather than relying primarily on the standing workgroups. The consortium created task forces or committees to define career readiness, sustainability, high school testing needs, and item packaging formats. In addition, Smarter Balanced established the FAAP, IQRP, and a finance committee to help guide its work.

### LOOKING AHEAD

The consortium will continue to work closely among its member states (including both the K-12 and higher education leads for the state). Smarter Balanced will hold three collaboration conferences and two meetings of its TAC. Following the end of the field test in June 2014, Smarter Balanced will identify lessons learned from the field test and review and finalize policies related to test administration, accessibility, and test security. The consortium will also use the data from the field test to set initial achievement standards and to review the ALDs that were established in Year 3.

During Year 4, Smarter Balanced will complete its sustainability planning. States will negotiate and sign a MOU with UCLA that will define each of their respective roles and responsibilities..

## Conclusion

---

Year 3 saw two significant milestones for Smarter Balanced. The consortium successfully conducted the pilot test to 650,000 students in more than 5,000 schools in spring 2013. Smarter Balanced also developed approximately 21,000 items and tasks for the field test that will take place in spring 2014. The successful pilot test and the release of practice tests in Year 3 provided an opportunity for states, districts, schools, teachers, and students to begin to see what the assessments will look like. The lessons learned from writing items for and conducting the pilot test and the results from the Department's Technical Review led the consortium to substantially revise its process for item development in Year 3 for the field test.

### SUCSESSES

- *Assessment development*

The pilot test provided an early opportunity to test the assessment delivery system and examine accessibility features. During Year 3, Smarter Balanced developed approximately 21,000 items and tasks in advance of the field test in spring 2014. The lessons learned from item development for the pilot test, many of which were also identified by the Department's Technical Review, led Smarter Balanced to significantly revise the item development process and institute additional quality control measures to improve the quality of the items and tasks developed for the field test.

In Year 3, Smarter Balanced also developed accessibility guidelines and worked to establish the accessibility resources in advance of the field test so that the consortium, schools, and students can try them out during the field test. Smarter Balanced released online practice and training tests that include the consortium's accommodations and accessibility features so that states, stakeholders, and the public may try out the assessments. The consortium also adopted initial ALDs and drafted a career readiness framework.

- *Technology*

Smarter Balanced has made significant progress realizing its vision for developing a technology-based assessment system. The consortium successfully administered the pilot test in Year 3 and prepared for a field test to more than 3 million students in Year 4. These activities provide opportunities for the consortium to pressure test the technology system in advance of the first full operational administration in the 2014-2015 school year. Smarter Balanced remains on track to release its assessment delivery platform as open-source software at the conclusion of the grant. This will support the consortium's sustainability plans as well as provide a benefit to all states, whether or not they are a member of Smarter Balanced. In Year 3, the consortium continued to support states, districts, and schools in their preparation for a technology-based assessment system by continuing to make the technology readiness tool available and including a gap analysis report that identifies whether the school or district has sufficient network bandwidth or devices. In addition, Smarter Balanced provided two tools to help school and district planning: an online tool for checking the bandwidth of a system's network and a technology readiness calculator to estimate the number of days and associated network bandwidth given the number of students, devices, and hours per day they are available for testing.

- *Sustainability*

The consortium made significant progress in putting in place the structure for the sustainability of the consortium following the conclusion of the grant. The Smarter Balanced Sustainability Task Force developed a plan and the governing states, March 2013, voted to co-locate with CRESST at UCLA following the end of the grant period in 2014. Smarter Balanced has identified an approach to remain a state-led organization with major budget, policy, and governance decisions resting with the governing states.

## CHALLENGES

- *Item development*

As noted above, Smarter Balanced made significant progress during Year 3, developing approximately 21,000 items for the field test in spring 2014. Following the pilot test and the Department's Technical Review, Smarter Balanced increased its quality control measures by establishing the IQRP, revising item specifications, developing item quality criteria and an item audit process, and completely revising the mathematics performance tasks. The Department acknowledges the difficult work building a next-generation assessment system to measure whether students have the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in college and the workforce. Smarter Balanced continued to experience challenges in Year 3 around adherence to established timelines and making sure the items and tasks developed met the consortium's quality criteria. The consortium should continue to evaluate whether its quality control processes are sufficient and provide close oversight over the development of future items and tasks to ensure that established timelines and quality criteria are being met. In Year 4, as Smarter Balanced develops additional items and tasks, it will need to be attentive to areas where it will need to improve the overall performance of the item pool.

- *Communications*

The complexity of this project and the wide array of individuals that will be impacted by the consortium's assessment system means that it is vital for Smarter Balanced to continue, and expand, its communications with state leaders, educators, students, parents, members of the public, and key interest groups. Providing each audience a clear understanding about the assessment system is critical to the consortium's success. In Year 4, several consortium activities will provide an opportunity to demonstrate the benefits and importance of the assessment system. The field test, the launch of the digital library, and the initial achievement standards setting are each significant milestones for the consortium and an opportunity to engage the interested groups and the public in the consortium's work.

The Department is pleased to note that the consortium has identified and taken initial steps to mitigate these risks. Smarter Balanced is planning to increase its communications around the field test and achievement standards setting. In particular, Smarter Balanced will provide an opportunity for up to 250,000 educators, higher education faculty, parents, and other interested individuals from all member states to review items and data from the field test using an online tool to make recommendations for the level 3 cut score.

Throughout the remainder of Year 4, 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 field test to more than 3.2 million students.
- Set initial achievement standards.
- Continue item and task development following the field test.
- Launch the digital library of formative tools and resources and continue identifying and developing resources to populate the library.
- Use data from the field test to identify the pool of items that will comprise the summative and interim assessments so that they are operational in the 2014-2015 school year.
- Continue to develop the technology system to support the development, administration, scoring, and reporting of the assessment system and establish the process to confirm adherence to the interoperability standards.
- Transition to UCLA to ensure the continued functioning of the consortium following the end of the grant.

## *Glossary*

---

**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. These assessments typically are given statewide and these days are usually used as part of an accountability program or to otherwise inform policy.



*The Department of Education's mission is to promote student achievement and preparation for global competitiveness by fostering educational excellence and ensuring equal access.*

[www.ed.gov](http://www.ed.gov)