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SENATE EDUCATION

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Overview of Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium for Montana Legislature

Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium is a state-led consortium working to develop a next-generation assessment system **aligned to the rigorous, 21st Century standards** embodied in the Common Core State Standards. The goal of Smarter Balanced is to ensure that all students – regardless of race, gender, ethnicity, economic status or background – leave high school **prepared for postsecondary success in college or a career.**

The work of the Smarter Balanced is guided the belief that a **high-quality assessment system** can provide information and tools for teachers and schools that **help improve teaching and learning**, and that help students succeed. Smarter Balanced, building upon the collective experience and expertise of its member states, is creating a high-quality, balanced, multi-state system of assessments that ensures comparability across all its member states.

A Balanced System

Smarter Balanced is composed of three major components that represent a comprehensive, coherent, and integrated system of assessments:

- An **end-of-year summative assessment** of mathematics and English/language arts in grades 3-8 and high school that meets state and federal requirements for accountability purposes;
- Optional **interim assessments** that can be administered throughout the year to check student progress; and
- **Formative assessment resources and tools** available on-demand to teachers through an online digital library.

Innovation and Technology

The end-of-year summative and on-demand interim assessments make use of proven technology advances both in terms of **innovative item types** – including constructed response and computer-enhanced items – and test delivery – using “**Computer Adaptive Technology**” (CAT) which assesses students with greater accuracy and efficiency than conventional tests.

Member states have collaborated to establish **minimum technology standards** for the delivery of the Smarter Balanced assessments that are compatible with existing equipment and bandwidth available in most schools. Smarter Balanced provides an online “**technology readiness tool**” giving schools and districts up-to-date information on technology gaps.

Accessibility for All

Smarter Balanced is committed to ensuring that all students (except those with the most significant cognitive disabilities) have **fair and unbiased access to its assessments**. The Smarter Balanced assessments are being designed from the very start to address visual,



auditory, physical access, and language barriers, allowing virtually all students to demonstrate what they know and can do.

Engagement with K-12 and Higher Education

Smarter Balanced collaborates with K-12 teachers and school leaders to:

- Provide support for implementation of the Common Core State Standards
- Provide training for teams of teachers from each state
- Develop the Smarter Balanced digital library of formative assessment practices and professional development tools
- Develop test items and tasks for the Pilot and Field Tests
- Score portions of the interim and summative assessments

Smarter Balanced is also committed to engaging higher education in the development and implementation of the assessment system, with the goal that colleges and universities across member states will accept performance on the assessment as evidence that high school students are ready for entry level, credit-bearing coursework.

Smarter Balanced Member States

Alabama	New Hampshire*
California*	North Carolina*
Connecticut*	North Dakota
Delaware*	Oregon*
Hawaii*	Pennsylvania
Idaho*	South Carolina*
Iowa*	South Dakota*
Kansas*	Vermont*
Maine*	Washington*
Michigan*	West Virginia*
Missouri*	Wisconsin*
Montana*	Wyoming
Nevada*	

*Governing States

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium is funded by a four-year grant from a U.S. Department of Education Race to the Top Assessment Program. Smarter Balanced assessments will be fully operational and available for state use beginning in the 2014-15 school year. For more information, please visit our website: SmarterBalanced.org



Smarter Balanced and Policymakers: Creating College- and Career-Ready Assessments

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium is creating next-generation tests aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) in English language arts/literacy and mathematics that will be available by the 2014-15 school year. The assessment system includes a rigorous computer adaptive summative test for grades 3-8 and 11 that provides accurate student performance and growth information to meet state and federal accountability requirements. In addition, optional computer adaptive interim assessments and formative resources aligned to the CCSS give teachers and principals the tools to help students meet today's college- and career-ready standards.

Key Features of Smarter Balanced

- ▶ A college- and career-ready evaluation based on the CCSS with results that are comparable nationwide and internationally benchmarked.
- ▶ Innovative item types go beyond multiple choice questions to include constructed response and performance tasks that measure critical thinking and problem solving.
- ▶ Support for Common Core implementation, including membership for Governing States in the Council of Chief State School Officers' Implementing CCSS state collaborative and a digital library of curriculum resources and instructional best practices for educators.

State-led Governance

Smarter Balanced is a state-led consortium, with governing authority flowing from state education chiefs and elected officials. Each state appoints K-12 and higher education leads to coordinate with the Consortium. State representatives direct the Executive Committee and participate in 10 Smarter Balanced work groups. Policy decisions are made by Governing States while Advisory States benefit by sharing resources and access to national experts and technical advisors.

Support for Implementation

Smarter Balanced is committed to addressing the concerns of states and ensuring a successful transition to new assessments. A technology readiness tool will allow states to estimate future information technology needs. A paper-and-

pencil version of the assessments will be available during a three-year transition period. In addition, the Consortium will also provide professional development and training for teams of educators from each state.

State Implementation Timeline

- ▶ 2011-2012 School Year—Technology readiness tool available
- ▶ Winter/Spring 2013—Pilot testing of assessment items and performance tasks
- ▶ Spring 2014—Field testing of summative and interim assessments
- ▶ 2014-15 School Year—Implementation of assessment system and launch of digital library

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A Summary of Core Components

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium is one of two multistate consortia awarded funding from the U.S. Department of Education to develop an assessment system based on the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS). To achieve the goal that all students leave high school ready for college and career, Smarter Balanced is committed to ensuring that assessment and instruction embody the CCSS and that all students, regardless of disability, language or subgroup status, have the opportunity to learn this valued content and to show what they know and can do.

With strong support from participating states, institutions of higher education and industry, Smarter Balanced will develop a balanced set of measures and tools, each designed to serve specific purposes. Together, these components will provide student data throughout the academic year that will inform instruction, guide interventions, help target professional development and ensure an accurate measure of each student's progress toward career- and college-readiness.

The core components of Smarter Balanced are:

Summative assessments:

- ▶ Mandatory comprehensive accountability measures that include computer adaptive assessments and performance tasks, administered in the last 12 weeks of the school year in grades 3–8 and 11 for English language arts(ELA)/literacy and mathematics;
- ▶ Designed to provide valid, reliable and fair measures of students' progress toward and attainment of the knowledge and skills required to be college- and career-ready;
- ▶ Capitalize on the strengths of computer adaptive testing (e.g. efficient and precise measurement across the full range of achievement and quick turnaround of results); and,
- ▶ Produce composite content area scores, based on the computer adaptive items and performance tasks.

Interim assessments:

- ▶ Optional comprehensive and content-cluster measures that include computer adaptive assessments and performance tasks, administered at locally determined intervals throughout the school year;
- ▶ Results reported on the same scale as the summative assessment to provide information about how students are progressing;
- ▶ Serve as the source for interpretive guides that use publicly released items and tasks;
- ▶ Grounded in cognitive development theory about how learning progresses across grades and how college- and career-readiness emerge over time;
- ▶ Involve a large teacher role in developing and scoring constructed response items and performance tasks;
- ▶ Afford teachers and administrators the flexibility to:
 - select item sets that provide deep, focused measurement of specific content clusters embedded in the CCSS;
 - administer these assessments at strategic points in the instructional year;

- use results to better understand students' strengths and limitations in relation to the standards;
- support state-level accountability systems using end-of-course assessments.

Formative tools and processes:

- ▶ Provides resources for teachers on how to collect and use information about student success in acquisition of the CCSS;
- ▶ Will be used by teachers throughout the year to better understand a student's learning needs, check for misconceptions and/or to provide evidence of progress toward learning goals.

System Features

- ▶ Ensures coverage of the full range of ELA/literacy and mathematics standards and breadth of achievement levels by combining a variety of item types (e.g., selected-response, constructed response, and technology-enhanced) and performance tasks, which require application of knowledge and skills.
- ▶ Provides comprehensive, research-based support, technical assistance and professional development so that teachers can use assessment data to improve teaching and learning in line with the standards.
- ▶ Provides online, tailored reports that link to instructional and professional development resources.

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Computer Adaptive Testing

The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium is a state-led consortium working collaboratively to develop next-generation assessments aligned to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) that measure student progress toward college- and career-readiness. The work of the Consortium is guided by the belief that a high-quality assessment system can provide resources and tools for teachers and schools to improve instruction and help students succeed.

An Innovative Approach

The Smarter Balanced assessment system capitalizes on the precision and efficiency of computer adaptive testing (CAT) for both the mandatory summative assessment and the optional interim assessments. Based on student responses, the computer program adjusts the difficulty of questions throughout the assessment. For example, a student who answers a question correctly will receive a more challenging item, while an incorrect answer generates an easier question. By adapting to the student as the assessment is taking place, these assessments present an individually tailored set of questions to each student and can quickly identify which skills students have mastered. This approach represents a significant improvement over traditional paper-and-pencil assessments used in many states today.

- ▶ **Better information for teachers:** Optional computer adaptive interim assessments will provide a more detailed picture of where students excel or need additional support, helping teachers to differentiate instruction. The interim assessments will be reported on the same scale as the summative assessment, and schools will have flexibility to assess small elements of content or the full breadth of the CCSS at locally-determined times throughout the year.
- ▶ **More efficient and more secure:** Computer adaptive tests are typically shorter than paper-and-pencil assessments because fewer questions are required to accurately determine each student's achievement level. The assessments draw from a large bank of questions, and since students receive different questions based on their responses, test items are more secure and can be used for a longer period of time.
- ▶ **More accurate:** Computer adaptive testing offers teachers and schools a more accurate way to evaluate student achievement, readiness for college and careers and to measure growth over time.

Support for States

Smarter Balanced is committed to helping states transition successfully to CAT. We collaborated with PARCC to develop a technology readiness tool to identify infrastructure gaps that might serve as barriers for computer-based assessments. States will have the option to administer a paper-and-pencil version of the summative assessment during a three-year transition period. Finally, the 12-week administration window for the summative assessment will reduce pressure on school information technology resources.

Additional Resources

Smarter Balanced is working with experts in the field of computer adaptive testing, drawing on the experience of member states like Oregon, which implemented CAT in 2001. For more information on CAT, see:

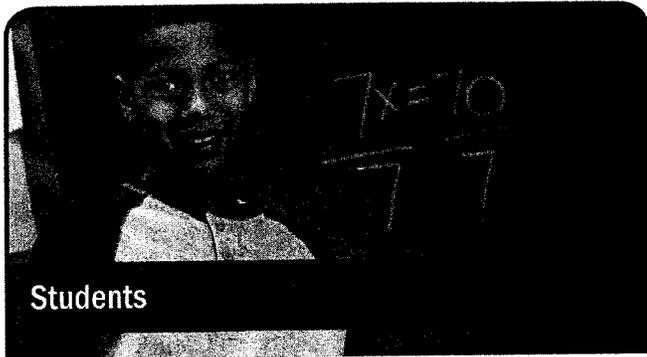
- ▶ *A Framework for the Development of Computerized Adaptive Tests*, Nathan A. Thompson, Assessment Systems Corporation, and David J. Weiss, University of Minnesota
- ▶ *The Road Ahead for State Assessments*, Rennie Center for Education Research & Policy, Policy Analysis for California Education (PACE)

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What Will Smarter Balanced Assessments Mean for Me?

Smarter Balanced is developing new assessments that measure the Common Core State Standards and help all students prepare for college and career. When the new assessments are implemented in the 2014-15 school year, parents, teachers, and policymakers will have better tools and information to track student progress and help them succeed.



Students

- ▶ I am challenged to complete complex tasks and apply my knowledge
- ▶ I know how I am progressing toward college- and career-readiness
- ▶ My test results will be accurate regardless of my ability, disability or proficiency in English



Parents

- ▶ My child's class time is focused on learning and not on testing
- ▶ My child will have opportunities to improve
- ▶ I will know whether my child's school is performing as well as it should



Teachers

- ▶ I won't be surprised by the test results at the end of the year
- ▶ I will have the supports I need to help my students
- ▶ The assessments measure the right things in the right way



Policymakers

- ▶ We are sharing costs with other states to provide a world-class test
- ▶ We can compare the performance and growth of our schools, districts and state so that we can improve
- ▶ We know the test will work for us because we helped build it