Q&A: Smarter Balanced Sample Items and Performance Tasks Webinar

Presentation, OSPI Smarter Balanced Website, and Smarter Balanced Released Items Page

Q: Where on the website will the PowerPoint be posted?
A: The PowerPoint presentation is posted at http://www.k12.wa.us/SMARTER/pubdocs/SmarterBalanced_SampleItems_Webinar.pptx

Q: Will a recorded version of today’s presentation also be posted?
A: The recording of the webinar is posted at http://www.k12.wa.us/SMARTER/pubdocs/SampleSmarterBalancedItems.wmv

Q: Where can I access the sampler being used in this presentation?
A: The sampler is available at http://www.smarterbalanced.org/sample-items-and-performance-tasks. Once on this page, scroll toward the bottom to find hyperlinks to the sample items for English Language Arts and Mathematics.

Q: Are all these samples connected to the summative assessments?
A: These are samples of items that will be included in the summative and interim assessments.

Q: Will the item release site be pulled down on November 2nd or just the opportunity to give feedback?
A: The technical support that can help with the site will end on Nov 2nd. We believe feedback will be welcomed after November 2nd, but certainly the sooner it is received, the better it will inform development.

Q: Will the sample items be released as PDFs?
A: No, that would be quite difficult with the technology-enhanced items.

Q: For the items that are not currently automatically scored online, is there an option for students to print their short answers or extended responses so the teacher can give feedback?
A: Yes, teachers are welcome to have students print their responses so they can be scored against the rubric, because these sample items are not secure.

Q: Is the instant scoring available for the purpose of the sample items, or will this be a functionality of the test, as well?
A: The instant scoring functionality, where you can click to see if the answer is correct or not, is for the purpose of the sample item showcase. Machine scoring will be available within the test engine for the Computer Adaptive portion of the tests. Those items will be scored instantly, but the score and explanations will not be instantly available to the test taker.

Q: When will K–2 items/passages be available?
A: The Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium is not developing items for K–2.
**Items in the Smarter Balanced Assessment**

Q: Do the sample items indicate grade level?
A: Yes, grade level is included in the item meta-data (far right tab).

Q: In the vocabulary example, the feedback is that the student highlighted one or more correct answers. The student also highlighted an incorrect answer, which calls into question whether the student does know the answer. Is this information reported in some way?
A: This is an all-or-nothing item. If the student selects at least one correct phrase and one incorrect phrase, the maximum points earned is 1, even if two or more other correct phrases are selected. The rubric on the Item Score demonstrates this.

Q: Will there be brief writing tasks at all grade levels?
A: Yes.

Q: Will Brief Writes be timed?
A: Brief writes will be in the adaptive engine and will not be timed, but they are designed to be brief — one to two paragraphs.

Q: Will the Smarter Balanced writing assessments be written online and scored by computers or by human evaluators?
A: They will be written online. The consortium is exploring how best to score them. Several research studies are underway to see how much artificial intelligence can be used, and when and where human scorers will be needed.

Q: For both English language arts and math when students are asked to "take notes" or need to do their own work to solve, will they do that online or with scratch paper?
A: Some of these answers are yet to be determined. This will depend on the test engine that is ultimately used, and further work that needs to be done on the administration protocols. For math, in particular, though, it is likely to depend on what the question asks students to do. If it asks for just an answer, their work would be done on scratch paper. If it asks them to show or explain, they would use the answer space, sometimes using equation-building tools and special on screen keyboards for special characters.

Q: The Measurements of Student Progress (MSP) and High School Proficiency Exam (HSPE) currently test mathematical calculations and basic math facts through grade 6, but not beyond that. How will Smarter Balanced deal with testing calculations and knowledge of basic math facts?
A: Smarter Balanced will measure fluency as defined in the standards, minus the "quickly," because research suggests that timed math-facts assessments are potentially damaging (due to anxiety in the test taker, and often in high-achieving kids) and could invalidate the whole test.

Q: Are calculators allowed at elementary?
A: No. The item specifications for grades 3–5 state that items should be written to be answered without calculators.
**Performance Tasks**

Q: Are there performance tasks at all grade levels?
A: Yes.

Q: Will proctors/teachers be given a script to standardize the performance task 20-minute classroom activity?
A: Yes.

Q: Are the Performance Tasks going to be written online and scored at the state level or are these classroom-based assessments?
A: Performance tasks will be written online and, most likely, scored by human readers.

Q: Who will be scoring the writing performance tasks?
A: The consortium hopes to involve teachers, perhaps as second scorers.

Q: Is the Google search engine built within the Smarter Balanced test?
A: The Google search engine in the performance task is contained within the Smarter Balanced test engine. The search will not be live, but rather links/sources will be cached in a folder from which the students can work.

Q: The term survey in the Nuclear Power performance task directions might be seen by the student as conducting a poll, not gathering web-based information.
A: We will pass this comment along to the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium via the feedback form on the Sample Item webpage.

Q: A student with a clear understanding of the political process would need to know which interest group the politician relies on for support in order to answer this question.
A: We will pass this comment along to the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium via the feedback form on the Sample Item webpage.

**Listening Items**

Q: Why are we adding listening back to the assessment?
A: Listening is part of the Common Core State Standards.

Q: Will each student need to have headphones to take the test?
A: This is still under consideration.

**General Assessment and Test Administration**

Q: Is it true that the interim assessments will provide information at the claim level only?
A: No, item information will also be available.

Q: Are these assessments untimed or will there be time limits?
A: All indications, to date, are that the tests are untimed.
Q: Will there be a testing window for high school students to complete the assessments, or will students be expected to test the same day?

A: With what we know now, we expect the testing window to be the last 12 weeks of school.

Q: The Smarter Balanced assessment system will include interim assessments and formative processes in addition to the summative tests. Should districts wait for the Smarter Balanced formative/interim assessments rather than moving ahead with the development of their own?

A: We know districts will begin to teach to the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) very soon, if they are not already doing so, and believe formative assessment is/should be an integral part of instruction. Therefore, it makes sense to develop formative assessment processes in advance of Smarter Balanced and then substitute or supplement when the Smarter Balanced resources become available.

Q: Will there be a cost to access the formative and interim assessments?

A: We believe there will be one cost for the assessment, which will include the formative tools, interim assessments and the summative test.

Q: What does it mean to be “vertically scaled”?

A: Tests from different grades can be placed on the same scale for reporting results so that a difference between scale scores reflects known amounts of growth (e.g., with a vertical scale, a scale score of 345 in grade 3 is comparable to a 345 in grade 4). Washington’s current tests are not vertically scaled. While our current tests have a common cut score of 400 for “proficient,” a scale score of 415 on the 3rd-grade test is not necessarily a lower performance than a score of 417 on a 4th-grade test.

Piloting

Q: Will the pilot items be on this year’s state assessments or will this be done outside the state assessments?

A: Smarter Balanced items will be piloted on a separate Smarter Balanced Pilot Test, to be given on a voluntary basis between February and May 2013.

Q: Can we see the list of 47 districts invited to participate in the Small-Scale Trials?

A: Yes, we can post this list.

Q: Can schools sign up for the pilot without the district?

A: Yes and no. Not all schools in a district need to volunteer but the district needs to support the school(s) that does volunteer.

Q: Will the schools and districts that participate in the pilot test (2013) and field test (2014) have to take the state assessments (MSP/HSPE/EOC) during the same year?

A: Yes, the requirement for accountability testing does not go away while we assist with the development of the new tests. The first year we won’t have the overlap is 2014–15.
Current Tests vs. 2015 and beyond

Q: My question is what, exactly, will the Smarter Balanced assessments be replacing in our current state testing?

A: As the PowerPoint illustrates, Smarter Balanced assessments in English language arts and mathematics will be given in grades 3–8 and 11, replacing our current Measurements of Student Progress (MSP) in reading, writing and mathematics in grades 3-8. The legislature will need to determine which tests will be used for graduation exit exams. If the legislature does not act to change the graduation requirements in the 2013 session, the current requirements--five tests in reading, writing, algebra, geometry and biology--will stand. In that case, for the 2014-15 school year, OSPI will need to produce a new set of tests that assess the Common Core standards in those areas and subjects.

Q: What about the grade 10 reading and math current exams? Will they be eliminated?

A: We believe we will have the opportunity to develop EOC and comprehensive tests that can be used as exit exams using the Smarter Balanced item bank, but we are not sure at this time if the High School Proficiency Exams in reading and writing and End-of-Course exams in mathematics will be converted to 10th-grade comprehensive tests or EOCs, or be eliminated.

Q: What's going to be the relationship between passing Smarter Balanced and graduation?

A: Given in 11th grade, the Smarter Balanced high school assessment will be used for federal accountability and test college and career readiness. Therefore, we will not need 10th-grade tests in English language arts and mathematics for federal accountability, but the legislature will need to determine which tests will be used for graduation exit exams.

Q: Why add an assessment in Grade 11?

A: The focus of the Common Core State Standards is to prepare students to be college and career ready. The consortium designed the high school assessment as an 11th-grade test because it did not seem fair to judge students, schools and districts on college and career readiness in 9th or 10th grade, when so much instruction was yet to come.

Q: Does this mean we will have another cut score for graduation?

A: The legislature will need to determine which tests will be used for graduation exit exams. If the 11th-grade test is the only exit exam, the State Board will need to determine if the same college- and career-ready cut score that will be used for federal accountability will be used for graduation, or if a different (high school proficiency) cut score will be used.

Q: Will the Biology EOC requirement go away when Smarter Balanced assessments are in place?

A: No, science is not part of the CCSS, and therefore not part of the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium.

Q: What about OSPI-developed assessments for social studies?

A: No changes.
Q: Will the same scale scores be used (e.g., 400 meeting standard each year), or will some other scale be used?

A: It is likely some other scale will be used, but this has not yet been determined.

**Computer Adaptive Tests**

Q: Is it true that Smarter Balanced assessments will be computer adaptive tests that change difficulty level based on student response?

A: Yes, the Smarter Balanced tests will have both a Computer Adaptive Testing (CAT) section as well as a performance task section at each grade level.

Q: Will the computer adaptive test assess standards above or below the grade level of the student in order to see where a student performs? Or will it only have items that are on or below grade level?

A: Past experience with adaptive testing suggests that a vast majority of students can obtain a precise measure using items from the current grade-level content only (assuming item writers attend to known methods for varying grade-level difficulty within the bounds of the standards). The consortium is tagging items for off-grade delivery and developing a plan for how the adaptive engine would select off-grade items (taking into account opportunity to learn and the progressions in the standards). These items would only be selected for a student for whom the existing grade-level pool fails to provide additional information, and would therefore typically be reserved for students at the two extremes.

**Accommodations**

Q: You have identified listening items as one of the differences with the Smarter Balanced Assessments. Will the test support read to accommodations for students receiving this accommodation on their IEP?

A: By definition, a listening item is presented in an audio file or orally by the proctor to the student(s). While there will be no built-in read-aloud available for the pilot, we expect the test engine will be ready to provide (audio file) read-aloud for the field test in 2013–14, as well as all the other access supports/accommodations intended for the first administration in 2014–15.

**Technology**

Q: So with the adaptive design, the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium assumes all students in Washington will be assessed online?

A: Beginning in spring of 2015, the preferred delivery method for all grade 3–8 and 11 summative tests will be online.

Q: Given that many districts are unable to provide computer access for assessment, and that Smarter Balanced clearly requires online testing, what steps are underway to provide technology for districts to carry out this requirement?

A: There will be a paper-and-pencil alternative, but because paper-and-pencil tests cannot provide an adaptive testing experience, it is definitely not the preferred format. The paper-and-pencil alternative will only be available for the first three years Smarter Balanced is administered, and will likely be at an additional cost. We are hoping that the data gathered through the IT Readiness
Survey (open again in a couple of weeks) will help us communicate the need for state or federal funding assistance for those districts that may lack the capacity to participate in the online testing.

Q: **What are some examples of ways in which districts are addressing the technology issue? We have 600 students in our 11th-grade class and are concerned about the logistical and technological needs.**

A: Some districts have been deploying portable labs (used to be called "Computers on Wheels" or "COWs") of laptops or netbooks (or looking ahead to 2015, classroom sets of tablets) as a way to address this issue.

Q: **Any word on how we are to get all of our students to participate in online testing when we are barely able to do several grade levels now with MSP?**

A: The Smarter Balanced testing window is designed for 12 weeks. This will allow greater carrying capacity for testing students online by schools and districts that struggle with the current five-week MSP test window.

Q: **Will all SBAC assessments be administered online, or will schools have a choice of online or paper-pencil like now?**

A: As noted above, there will be a paper-and-pencil alternative, but because it cannot provide an adaptive testing experience, it is not the preferred format. While the online test will also provide a significant number of accommodations, it should be noted that any student whose IEP dictates a paper-and-pencil delivery should continue to have that option.

**Higher Education**

Q: **Is the Washington Higher Education System engaged in the Smarter Balanced work to ensure IHEs have buy in to this new college readiness testing protocol? If so, how are they involved and engaged?**

A: Yes. Randy Spaulding is the IHE state lead, and is working closely with Bill Moore from SBCTC. Randy can be reached at randys@wsac.wa.gov.

Q: **Is there a possibility that the higher ed institutions in the state will agree to using the Smarter Balanced assessments as an alternative to the many current placement exams?**

A: Along with Randy Spaulding and Bill Moore, OSPI personnel are working with higher education personnel from Washington and across the nation on K-12 to higher education transitions. The intent is to have the Smarter Balanced assessments, which will be set to reflect college and career ready standards, be accepted as an alternative to current placement exams.