

Highlights of Our Progress

K-12 and higher education faculty review Smarter Balanced draft achievement level descriptors (ALDs). A draft set of detailed ALDs for each grade level were made available to states on November 12 and to the general public on November 27. They were available for review and feedback until January 15, 2013. A new draft reflecting comments received during this period will be made available to states for further review and refinement on February 4, with a final deadline for comments of February 20. States will receive a copy of the final draft in early March prior to a state vote on the documents at the Consortium's Collaboration Conference (see below). This vote will be based on a shared judgment by each Governing State's K-12 and higher education leadership.

Higher education representatives review draft college content-readiness definition and policy framework. To guide colleges and universities, schools, students, and parents in interpreting student performance, state higher education leads, in collaboration with state K-12 leads and college and high school faculty, have developed a draft operational definition of college content-readiness and accompanying policy framework. Together, this definition and policy framework describe what a college content-readiness designation means in the context of the Smarter Balanced assessment and how schools, colleges and universities, students, and parents should interpret student performance. The definition and framework are included in the ALD document and will be reviewed and voted on according to the schedule described above.

Smarter Balanced develops long-term sustainability plan. In consultation with consulting firm McKinsey & Co., the Smarter Balanced staff and Sustainability Task Force are developing plans for the long-term sustainability of the Consortium after cessation of the federal grant on September 30, 2014. An interim progress report was presented to the higher education leads on January 9. The final sustainability plan, which Governing States will be asked to endorse in March, will include the following elements:

- Draft mission, vision, and value proposition statements;
- Scope of Smarter Balanced services and pricing estimates for both Smarter Balanced- and vendor-provided services;
- Recommended legal entity option; and
- Proposed organizational and financial models and accompanying implementation plan.

The Governing States adopt preliminary blueprints for summative assessments. These blueprints, which are available at <http://www.smarterbalanced.org/smarter-balanced-assessments/>, are referred to as preliminary because they establish assessment design features that may be subject to refinement and revision after analysis of pilot and field testing. Final blueprints for the Smarter Balanced summative assessments will be adopted by Governing States prior to full implementation in the 2014-15 school year. The blueprint guides the development and assembly of an assessment by specifying essential information with regard to content, emphasis and balance of content, item types, and item complexity.

Smarter Balanced completes survey on college and university placement policies. To help higher education prepare for implementation of the Smarter Balanced assessment system, the Consortium launched a survey in late October to collect information on the placement instruments used by colleges and universities in its member states, other criteria evaluated in placement decisions, and cut scores below which students are placed into remedial or developmental coursework. The data collection window closed in early December with responses received from nearly 400 institutions representing 58 percent of public colleges and universities in Smarter Balanced Governing States. Higher education leads have received reports detailing responses from each institution in their respective states in addition to a summary of the national results.

Upcoming Opportunities for Involvement

Collaboration Conference planned for March 18-22, 2013 in Arlington, VA. Bringing together state K-12 and higher education leads, Chief State School Officers, as well as Smarter Balanced work groups and vendors, these twice-yearly meetings are the venue of significant decision-making for Smarter Balanced. State votes on the agenda for the March conference include Achievement Level Descriptors, College Content-Readiness Policy, and Sustainability Plan.

Reporting System Focus Groups Begin. Beginning in February with a focus group of the higher education leads, faculty and registrars will be asked to weigh in on requirements and prototype designs for the Smarter Balanced reporting system. Higher education feedback will be sought on student/parent reports for the 11th grade summative assessment as well as on information that colleges and universities will need to interpret and use Smarter Balanced scores.